A MAJORITY OF ONE

Tom Aikens and Independent Politics in Townsville

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Typeset by Academy Press Pty Ltd, Brisbane
Printed and bound by Silex Enterprise & Printing Co., Hong Kong

Distributed in the United Kingdom, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and the Caribbean by Prentice-Hall International, International Book Distributors Ltd, 66 Wood Lane End, Hemel Hempstead, Herts., England

National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication data

Moles, Ian Newton, 1935–
A majority of one.

Index
Bibliography
ISBN 0 7022 1285 7

1. Aikens, Thomas, 1900–. 2. Queensland–Politics and government–1924-1977–Biography. I. Title.

320.9'94'3

Interviewer: There are people who call you Tory Tom, that say you will line up with the government when the votes are cast. How true is this?

Tom Aikens: Well that's all bunk. As a matter of fact in the last session of Parliament I never voted with the Government once, but the Labor Party went over and voted with the Government I think eleven times. . . .

Australian Broadcasting Commission,
Television Documentary Transcript,
PNM.37 (17 May 1969)

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Foreword

Few back-benchers warrant a political biography. Tom Aikens does. Each Australian state has developed a political style of its own, the product of its history, geography and economic patterns. For Queensland the sounds of Aikens on the stump are a fitting overture to the state political opera. His boisterous enthusiasm for the political life, hearty contempt for silvertails and tall poppies, readiness to shoot from the hip at any head that showed over the parapet, devotion to the cause of the little man—especially if he lives far enough north or west of Brisbane, have been the themes which Premiers and party leaders have developed and elaborated.

Few Independents last in Australian politics. Aikens' thirty-three years in the Legislative Assembly are a remarkable exception to the rule. In eight of thirteen successive elections he won an absolute majority of votes, twice more than three-quarters of the votes, in Mundingburra/Townsville South. As a display of virtuosity in political survival such a career is unique. Ian Moles' explanation of how it was done, by a mixture of electoral service and electoral entertainment, is a significant contribution to understanding the real political world.

Tom Aikens' migration across the political spectrum from left to right parallels the steady drift of state politics from the radicalism of Ryan and Theodore through the conservative labourism of Forgan Smith, Hanlon and Gair to the increasingly right-wing coalition governments which followed Labor's defeat in 1957. Yet in matters of style he always bore the stamp of Charters Towers and the "Curry", the region where the Australian Labor Party began and whence it drew its strength for so long. In his last years in Parliament he sometimes seemed a solitary link with a past that had vanished from most of the state, at other times proof that the gut emotions of half a century earlier could still be effective politics. In writing this biography

Ian Moles supplies a valuable chapter of Queensland history. He should have had as much fun writing the story as Tom Aikens had living it.

Colin A. Hughes
Canberra

Preface

This is not strictly speaking a work of biography, though it is at the same time plainly biographical. Indeed it could probably best be described as three biographies rolled into one, each intermeshing with, and inseparable from, the other two. They are of a politician, his home town and his party. The politician is one of the most colourful and controversial figures ever to have stormed the hustings in Australia. "Renegade", "dingo", "rat", "mud-slinger", "communist", "fascist": he was bombarded with every insult in the political vocabulary. No-one, however, ever called him a fool. His supporters always swore with not a whit less passion—and still do—that here was a paragon among men and a veritable saint among politicians. The man is Tom Aikens, the town Townsville and the party the North Queensland Labour Party.

So far as I am aware, there has been no other full-length treatment of an Independent in any Australian political context, state or federal. Accordingly, while the perspective of this work is always historical and it is as much a study of period and place as it is of politics, there is a particular kind of political personality that it tries to plumb—that of the Independent. In effect, I try to analyze the political role of the Independent politician in a predominantly two-party system. Since the politician under scrutiny moreover happened to be an eminently successful politician *qua* politician, I may also be providing all legislators, actual or would-be, with a manual of rules for political survival.

The main focus of the narrative is a period of about thirty years from 1932, when the North Queensland Labour Party had its origins, to 1963, when it was all but moribund. Between 1961 and 1963, though not until then, the party finally came to recognize the inevitability of its approaching demise. 1961 was

in fact the first year that had gone by since its inception that the party failed to contest a municipal election.

Those years were also a watershed for the two other principal protagonists, Tom Aikens and Townsville. On the one hand, the Queensland state election of 1963 was one of the most satisfying and successful that Tom ever fought. Indeed it almost appeared as though there were some sort of inverse correlation between his party's decline and his own electoral triumph. On the other hand, Townsville entered upon a period of rapid and spectacular growth which so altered its character—certainly to all appearances—that Tom's particular brand of politics seemed increasingly quaint and anachronistic. That he continued to remain distinctly visible, however, notwithstanding an ever-contracting electorate, an ever-ageing constituency and an ever-changing society was all the more a tribute to his enduring virtuosity. Sadly, when Tom does finally go—he received a temporary setback in 1977—it is not merely that Australian politics will seem the poorer; a rich and irrecoverable part of Australian history will also have vanished with him.

I have to thank the many people who helped me in the preparation of this book: first and foremost, Professor Colin Hughes who first put me on Tom's track and whose unflagging interest, manifested in a variety of concrete ways right up to the reading of a final draft of the manuscript, kept me doggedly in pursuit of my quarry. Professors Crisp, Mayer and Rydon provided encouragement and some useful bibliographical suggestions which were the more valued when I found out—to my great astonishment—that studies of Independents both in Australia and overseas were practically non-existent, as indeed were other relevant points of scholarly reference. Of course Tom himself was my most patient interlocutor.

I am most grateful, too, to the legion of archivists, librarians and others whose efficiency and courtesy were unfailing—especially Mrs Doreen Wheeler, custodian of the Townsville municipal records, Mrs Lorraine McKnight of the Australian Archives in Canberra and Mr Bart Lourigan, formerly State Secretary of the Queensland branch of the Australian Labor Party. Mr Alan Birtwell, Shire Clerk at Cloncurry, was very helpful; so, too, was Mr Michael Douman, my Riverina colleague and former student who directed me to several sources on the World War II period that I had missed. The comments of another long-time student, Doug Hunt, as well as those of Professor Brian Dalton, both of whom also read the manuscript, were not only warmly encouraging but astute. Last but not least,

I am indebted to Mr Jack O'Brien whose colourful and elegant letters to the editor of the local newspaper have contributed significantly to whatever "feeling" for the period is here conveyed.

The chapter entitled "The Compleat Politician" is substantially the same as my constituency study which was earlier published in Colin Hughes' book, *Images and Issues: The Queensland State Elections of 1963 and 1966* (Canberra, 1969), though it has been revised and incorporates some new material. I have again to thank Colin Hughes and his publisher for permission to reproduce that study in this fuller context. Since the completion of the manuscript in 1974 (with the exception of some obvious up-dated additions), parts of it have also appeared in Dr F.H. Bauer's *North Australia Research Bulletin*, Number 1 (Australian National University, Canberra, 1977) and Professor Brian Dalton's *Lectures on North Queensland History*, Series I and III (James Cook University of North Queensland, Townsville, 1974 and 1978). They have both generously given me permission to use that material in this final format.

Research for the book was made possible by grants from the James Cook University of North Queensland and the Australian Research Grants Committee. To both of these bodies I offer my sincere thanks. Nobody, of course, except myself, was responsible for the faults and short-comings that I have been unable to correct.

Ian Moles
Townsville

Introduction

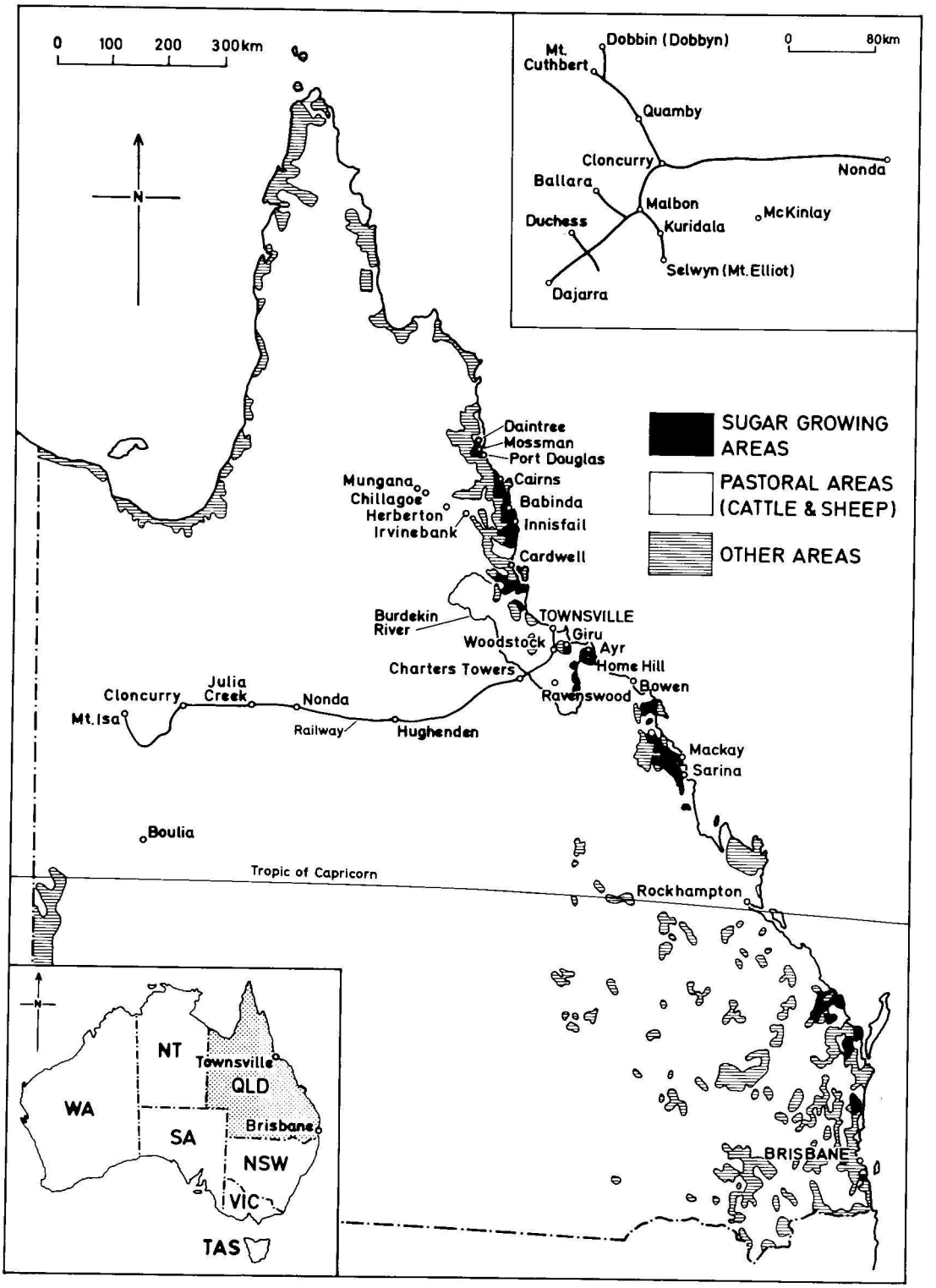
"Every country has its South", and in Australia, according to southerners, it is the northern State of Queensland. As in all the other states and the Federation itself, two political groupings normally compete for legislative power: on the Right, property-owners, and on the Left, those who would like to be and often are. The former have gone by various names—United, Nationalist, People's, Liberal, Country, National; the latter usually by one—Labor. The one disparages the other as "socialist" and is in turn abominated as "capitalist". The differences between the two are, however, so slight that it is not unusual for the entire political spectrum to be encompassed in the beliefs, and indeed the political career, of one man.

Such a man was Thomas Aikens who by 1974 had become the doyen or "father" of the Queensland legislature, the member of parliament who had survived in office longer than any other incumbent. Since 1944, as leader and sole parliamentary representative of the North Queensland Labour Party (NQLP)[1], he very likely held the record for longevity as an "Independent" in any parliament acknowledging the paternity of Westminster. Actually, the NQLP was now the NQP, for early in 1974, in anticipation of the Australian Labor Party's crushing defeat at the polls, Aikens had expunged the word "Labour" from his party's name. The NQLP was originally the Hermit Park branch of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) until its "expulsion" in 1942 by the ALP's Queensland Central Executive (QCE), and it dominated the municipal politics of Townsville from 1939 to 1949. For three of those years (1943–46) the NQLP ruled Townsville in coalition with the Communist Party—the first of only two occasions in Australian electoral history when the Communist Party gained not merely elected representation but also active participation in government.[2]

North Queensland begins about 960 km north of the Queensland state capital of Brisbane and extends almost another 1600 km to the tip of Cape York peninsula. It lies wholly within the tropics and is the home of the only significant concentration of people in Australia north of the Tropic of Capricorn. It is an immense region, somewhat larger than Italy, but with a good deal less than 1 per cent of that country's population. North Queenslanders are thus sparsely settled throughout the region and isolated not only from the chief centres of population in the south but also from one another. Two of its four main cities, Cairns and Mackay, are about as far apart from each other as are Sydney and Melbourne (or Paris and Rome). Townsville, the "capital" of the north, is equidistant between Cairns and Mackay but still 960 km away from the only major inland city, Mount Isa.

North Queensland is a bountiful region; indeed, a mere one hundred years after its first settlement by Europeans, it is one of Australia's most productive areas. Mount Isa in the west throbs with titanic industry, producing a large proportion of the world's silver, lead, zinc and copper; Weipa in the north is a major supplier of the world's bauxite; the lush coastal plains, stretching for 960 km from Daintree in the north to Sarina in the south, are an almost unbroken expanse of sugar cane, the region's staple; some of the largest and fattest herds of beef cattle in the world roam the otherwise empty interior.

Tom Aikens, born in 1900, grew up in Charters Towers, a city straddling the Great Dividing Range which separates the coastal strip from the vast interior. Here, the first round of north Queensland's mineral discoveries came before the close of the nineteenth century, and Tom does not remember the heyday of the original mining enterprises. Yet, true to Queensland's socialist heritage, its governments had kept the stampers going for a few hours a week so that lone prospectors could crush their store of stone, and this, with the help of some pension money, made the desultory continuing life of these old mining centres possible. Indeed, not only north Queenslanders but anyone born in Australia at the turn of the century was conscious of the importance of the mining industry and of the myths that grew up about it. There was the way in which the older generation spoke of the great finds, and the respect with which, in mining households, specimens were brought out to awe visitors—quartz crystals with embedded veins of gold; the dark green of malachite; dull, weighty samples of tin; the moss-like stain, peacock-blue and vivid green, spread by copper on its parent



Map of Queensland: top insert showing the Cloncurry railway network during the 1920s. Cartography by courtesy of Department of Geography, James Cook University of North Queensland.

rock. It was inconceivable that this sense of the mining past could ever vanish from Australia; and if the entire continent's development—economic, social and political—had been stimulated, perhaps even determined, by mining, then in Queensland, the frontier of a land which was itself a frontier, mining was more than ever the impetus for growth.

When Tom Aikens was a lad, Charters Towers was already surrounded by barren country where herds of goats foraged and where every last tree had been cut down to manufacture charcoal for the miners' hungry furnaces. In the town itself, gold was now playing a secondary role to boarding schools and old people's homes. But in this town, the oldest and most prosperous of the mining centres in the north, Queensland's radical movement was nurtured. Here the miners of the 1880s and 1890s read Bellamy's *Looking Backward* and talked about Karl Marx and Henry George. Here, at a time when most colonists accepted the monarchy as unquestionably as they accepted God, a local paper published couplets like,

> We are against the expenses and waste
> of Royalty's glamour and taste

At first, in this egalitarian north, where working for oneself had always been considered as desirable as working for wages, there had been scarcely any distinction between the men who owned the claims and those who worked them. The managers of mines and large shareholders, while no longer labourers for wages, were still essentially pioneers and had invariably done heavy manual work of one kind or another. All through the north, in those early days, there was a general acceptance of the notion of giving everyone a "fair go", with the aim of overcoming the tradition of aristocratic leadership. But mechanization of the mines, and the problems that accompanied it, gradually eroded the old relationships. As the nineteenth century drew to a close,

> There was a growing realization that the day of easy opportunities was over for the working miners. Others had made the profits—the share-pushers, the company secretaries, the mill-owners—but the working miner, after chasing the rainbow's end across North Queensland for twenty years, was now likely to spend the rest of his career on wages, without ever winning to the independence which had attracted so many to the North.[3]

In search of that independence, Tom Aikens later became a roustabout in the shearing shed of Oxton Downs station outside Julia Creek, where he also absorbed the rebellious spirit of the nomads and ramblers of the west—the shearers and itinerant

bush workers of north Queensland whose militancy was a byword in the labour movement. Still later, in Cloncurry, he joined the Queensland Railways and served an exacting political apprenticeship as Acting Secretary, Vice-President and President of the Australian Railways' Union (ARU), Delegate to the Northern District Committee of the ARU, Secretary of the Cloncurry branch of the ALP, Councillor and Deputy Chairman of the Cloncurry Shire Council.

The years during which Aikens held elected office in Cloncurry were also characterized by a progressive disillusionment among workers with the ALP government that ruled in Brisbane. When the ALP eventually fell from power in 1929, after fourteen years continuously in office, this was because large numbers of its hitherto loyal supporters deserted it. The root cause of the problem was a twofold one: on the one hand, some sections of the labour movement deplored the snail's pace at which socialization appeared to be proceeding; on the other hand, a much larger core of workers discovered to its chagrin that the Labor government was not only not the model employer they had expected it to be but even a downright unsympathetic one. Nowhere in Queensland were these feelings more pronounced than in the north and among the ranks of railway workers. As early as 1919 railwaymen had begun to denounce their employer for bureaucratic "injustice, pin-pricking and tyranny". The men who had long led the ARU were not communists, but they were vigorously left-wing in their beliefs, constantly proselytizing an ideological position which was "one of socialism with strong Marxist overtones", and frequently "sounding like communists". Increasingly the government responded by stigmatizing them as "communists" and "revolutionaries".

Transferred to Townsville during the brief interregnum of the non-Labor Moore government, Aikens became a foundation member of the Hermit Park (a Townsville suburb) branch of the ALP whose members, almost to a man, belonged to the ARU. He soon discovered, too, that the political climate of Townsville was even more militant, if that were possible, than the one in the west where he had earlier received his political tutelage. Many of the ramblers and nomads from the west eventually ended up in Townsville; the place had also acquired a reputation for industrial anarchy that most residents traced back to "Bloody Sunday" in 1919— the savage culmination of a meat workers' strike when police actually fired on workers and a number of people were injured. After 1922, Townsville's

radical reputation was further enhanced by her new status as organizational centre of the communist movement in North Queensland. Throughout the 1930s the Communist Party enjoyed a period of astonishing growth which was without parallel anywhere else in Australia, climaxing in 1944 when F.W. Paterson, barrister, Townsville alderman, sometime Rhodes Scholar, became the first and so far the only communist member of an Australian parliament.

An accomplished bush orator, Aikens played the role of acknowledged left-wing spokesman with relish and panache. In 1936 he was elected to an aldermanic seat on the Townsville City Council, and on his second try in 1939 became Deputy Mayor after polling more votes than any other Labor candidate. Most lunch-times, the Labor municipal Caucus met conspiratorially behind the Locomotive Foreman's Office and there, huddled over their battered black tucker boxes, thrashed out the policies which were to shape Townsville's destiny over the next decade. What finally emerged was a determination not only to proceed with the public acquisition of the city's main utilities, but also to initiate municipal competition in a great many lesser fields traditionally reserved to private enterprise—in short, to inaugurate a bold, thoroughgoing and, in many respects, novel programme of municipal socialization. During and immediately after World War II, a City Council controlled by a coalition of Hermit Park "ALP" and communist aldermen (which in 1943 went to the polls as the "Greater Townsville Labour Party") effected the public ownership of a remarkable range of utilities and services—a Ladies' Rest Room (incorporating a free baby-stroller service for mothers shopping in the city), a Wood Depot, a Fruit and Vegetable Mart, a Legal Aid Department, a Municipal Ice Works and a Child Care Centre. By 1949 plans were well in hand for the development of workers' housing, a people's bakery and the "municipalization" of all bus services, when the Hermit Park "ALP" finally fell from power.

In fact, there had been a fly in the ointment from the very beginning. Tom Dougherty, later federal secretary of the Australian Workers' Union (AWU) and then its northern district secretary, a man whose stature and pertinacity made him at least the equal of Aikens, challenged the left-wing champion for leadership of the labour movement in Townsville. As the principal local mouthpiece and standard-bearer of ALP right-wing orthodoxy, which was gradualist, multi-class and moderate, Dougherty was bound to clash with Aikens. Each of the rivals was very much alike in the strength of his ambition and

ideological conviction, but each faced the other from opposite ends of their party's ideological spectrum. At the end of 1940, Dougherty was able to engineer Aikens' expulsion from the ALP of the grounds of the latter's occasional but sensational alcoholic "benders".

Aikens never again became a member of the ALP, but he did soon resume membership of the Hermit Park branch. The explanation for that apparent anomaly lay in the fact that the branch itself was presently "expelled" from the ALP. By a remote quirk of fate, Tom Aikens regained his political platform; then, with supreme political aplomb and in defiance of every known canon of electoral survival, he made the renegade Hermit Park branch into the dominant political force in Townsville, slaying the Goliath of the ALP and reversing the electoral behaviour of a generation.

In January 1942 four leading members of the Hermit Park ALP, all aldermen, were advised by the QCE that they had voluntarily "left the party" because of their connections with a Townsville "Aid to Russia" Committee which, along with other "communist subsidiary organizations", the ALP had recently placed under interdict. In fact the Townsville membership of the anathematized committee was politically heterogeneous and unexceptionable; all other members of the Hermit Park branch, in a gesture of loyal solidarity, therefore chose to join their comrades in exile. Not only that, they resolved to "fight the tyranny of the QCE" by fielding a strong team of candidates in the 1943 municipal election. Since it was impossible to conceive of any "strong" team which did not include the Deputy Mayor, Tom Aikens, whose popularity meanwhile had waxed in inverse proportion to his falling stocks within the ALP, the branch invited its black sheep to return to the fold after more than two years of obloquy. In the subsequent election, Aikens topped the poll, seven of the ten successful aldermen were Hermit Park rebels, and not a single ALP alderman was returned.

Of course, it was not merely local outrage at QCE "despotism" which resulted in such an incredible reversal of ALP fortunes. Townsville was also at war, and probably no other community in Australia during World War II was thrown back quite so rudely on its own resources in the face of such formidable odds. Certainly that was the judgment not merely of Townsvilleans themselves but also of a host of surprised and concerned outsiders. All testified to the demoralization of a citizenry beleaguered by Japanese air raids, the threat of

imminent invasion, widespread evacuation, protracted military occupation by forces heavily outnumbering the civilian population, persistent shortages of essential goods, a sense of isolation from the mainstream of Australian life and of actual abandonment by distant and insensitive governments—of which the QCE's ostracism of the Hermit Park branch was just a palpable and notably crass example. As late as mid-1944, north Queenslanders still nurtured "an abiding sense" that southern governments in Brisbane and Canberra were ignorant of their total war-time experiences and indifferent to them. The chief spokesman of that mood was Tom Aikens, and in 1944 Townsvilleans elected him to parliament in Brisbane to evoke it, to shame and bludgeon "Queen Street Government" with it.

There were several reasons why Tom was re-elected to parliament over and over again. To his constituents, "as far as orators go, there were only two men in Australia, that was Menzies and Aikens, and Aikens had it on Menzies because he put humour in his speeches"; as a campaigner he was also a politician's politician, forever refining the techniques of his art. But pre-eminently it was because he proved a "local" member *par excellence*: as the people's representative he was always visible, accessible and helpful. Moreover, his policy of "A Square Go for the North" was perfectly attuned to the deepest of his constituents' emotional and historical predilections. There were plenty of mavericks among them, and they enjoyed having one to represent them.

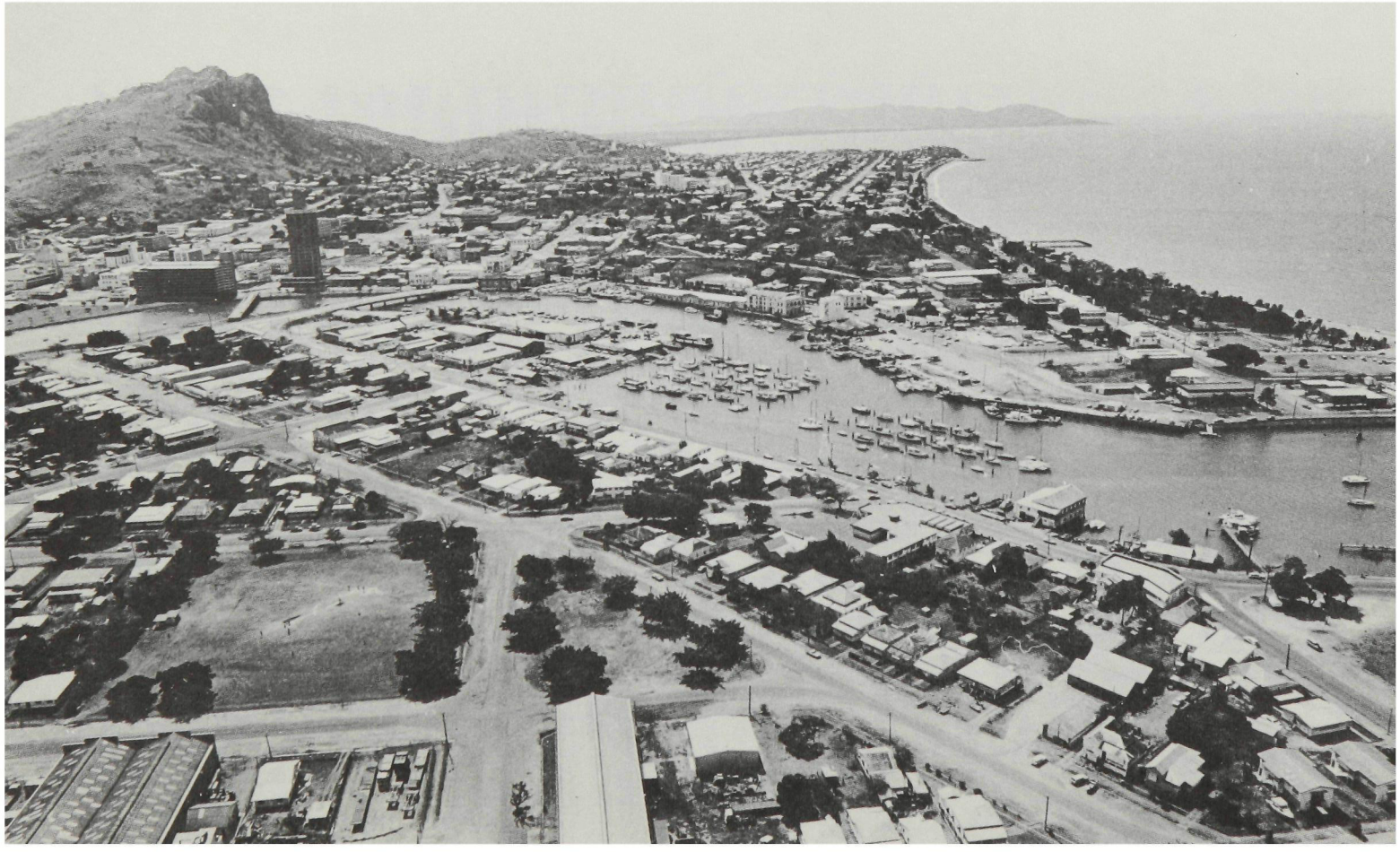
1

Maverick Country

North Queenslanders live in a land of silent remoteness. It is the frontier of a country which is itself a frontier of the civilization to which it belongs. In the nineteenth century it was noted for its outback flavour—a combination of wildness and crudity. Since in that period travel throughout the remoter areas of the Empire was a favoured pastime of the English aristocracy, this flavour was remarked upon in London, and caused people there to wonder, with indignation, whether Queensland "was indeed a *British* colony".

This sometimes overpowering sensation of remoteness is best experienced in travelling north by train. After crossing the Tropic of Capricorn the train meanders for several hours through the wallum country, a strip close to the coast from which the fertility has been leached by heavy coastal rains. The perennial problem of some coastal parts of north Queensland, so often referred to in the letters of the pioneers, is here starkly exposed —the region's long dry periods followed by torrential downpours. The north has a four-month summer wet season. The rain clouds come in on the southeast wind off the Pacific and water a narrow coastal belt between the sea and the Great Dividing Range. When the first Europeans came, much of this belt was covered with thick rain-forests, but now crops, such as fruit, maize and, above all, sugar, predominate in the rich, chocolate-coloured soil. West of the Divide, the land gets steadily drier, the vegetation sparser and less varied.

Sugar country begins after the train has travelled for about five hours north of Capricorn. At Mackay, centre of the largest sugar-growing area on the Queensland coast, there hangs in the air, mingling with the smell of salt blown in from the sea, the heavy, sweet scent of sugar—bulk sugar from the storage sheds or burnt cane in the fields. People dress differently now from Australians in the southern cities—the men tie-less and in shorts,



Modern Townsville, looking north to Cape Pallarenda and showing Castle Hill, Cleveland Bay, the city and Ross Creek. Photo by courtesy of the *Townsville Daily Bulletin*.

the women stocking-less and in light cotton dresses. The air is heavy and humid; beads of sweat form on leathery, sunburnt faces; people do not hurry but amble, or stand ruminatively on the kerbs of tree-shaded streets. Going north again, the train winds through the high, craggy hills above Mackay, as the smoke from bush fires or burning cane slowly coils along the slopes of valleys bright with green. During the wet season, the line along the coast is vulnerable to floods, and sometimes the train creeps along very slowly, over wooden bridges that creak with age against swirling waters, or around bends where a subsidence in the permanent way causes the train to incline at a fearful angle to one side. The loneliness is mitigated only by tiny sidings, station-masters swinging their lanterns, cattle in silhouette, occasional sparkles of light from lonely farm houses.

After an all-night journey from Mackay, nearly a day after leaving the Tropic, the train arrives in Townsville. Dominating the city is a mass of bare pinkish-beige granite called Castle Hill, which, at sunset when the last rays of the tropical sun strike its face, becomes suffused with a rapidly changing glow of violet, rose and orange.

Townsville was named after a bold and rather imaginative old Pacific trader, Captain Robert Towns, and it had gone through a period of fierce competition with some of the other northern outposts. But Townsville afforded both trouble-free entry from the sea and practical access to the interior, unlike Bowen to the south, which was on the wrong side of the constantly flooding Burdekin River; or Mackay, with its barred estuary; or Cardwell, 160 km to the north, where the only route west was over steep ranges. By 1866 Townsville had become a starting point for coaches heading into the hinterland, and northbound ships were also stopping off there. The year 1866 was a year of drought, and the cattle from the stations were too weak to be got to market and had to be fed to the boiling-down works. News came that year that gold had been discovered nearby, setting off a small rush; then there was word of more gold in the Etheridge River district to the northwest; and finally, in 1872, magnificent finds were made at Charters Towers, not quite 160 km away to the west and at the top of a low, gently-sloping pass through the Great Divide.

Townsville's population when Tom Aikens arrived there to live in 1930 was about 25 000. It took another thirty years for that population to double, but only ten more after that for the figure to treble, making Townsville by far the largest city in the Australian tropics. It is a flat, hot, dusty, shabby place, lying

in a pocket of tropical savannah which is barren, brown and boring. Its climate seems distinctly atropical: Townsvilleans themselves resignedly speak of it as "a continuing drought interrupted by an occasional flood". Practically the entire annual rainfall gushes from the sky all at once, flooding the streets, leaching the soil, leaving behind a turbid haze of moisture and mildew. In fact, however, Townsville receives less rain in an average year than Sydney, though a little bit more than Brisbane. The wet tropics begin a hundred kilometres or so further north, in towns like Tully, Innisfail and Babinda, Australia's wettest places, where rainfalls are more sensibly measured in metres rather than in millimetres.

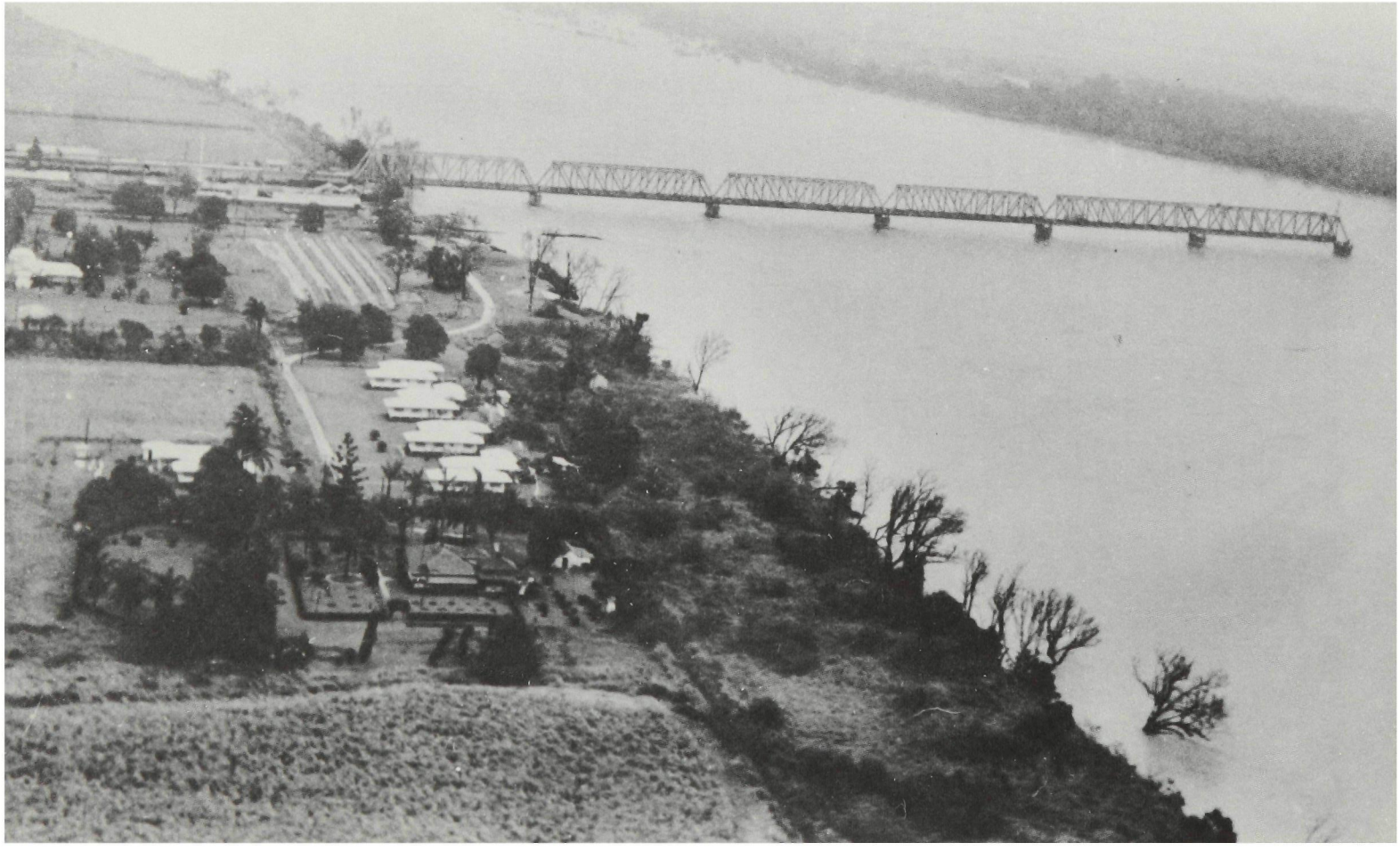
Townsville sprawls along the foreshores of Cleveland Bay whose shallow waters were for decades discoloured and polluted by the discharge of raw sewage and of offal from two meat-works. Only the foolhardy swim unprotected in the sea, which swarms with all the familiar marine denizens, as well as a profusion of exotics as lethal as they are lovely. The alluring silhouettes of Palm and Magnetic Islands just off shore, would grace the most tempting of travel brochures; but since the one is an inaccessible Aboriginal reserve and the other a soporific haven for retired folk, the avid tourist has never long entertained his chimeras in Townsville. Castle Hill, the city's most striking natural feature and virtually its only prominence, squats Gibraltar-like in the middle of the oldest part of town, seeming to squeeze the main business area into the sea. Most of the suburbs straddle a series of salt-pans and expiring mangrove swamps between Ross Creek and Ross River, two ugly and lifeless watercourses that roughly bisect the town.

Many of Townsville's buildings instil an impression of squalid decay of a kind which only Xavier Herbert can evoke. Houses are mostly wooden boxes on stilts, often peeping above chest-high guinea grass; a large number are even devoid of external weather-boards. Others were actually uprooted from the moribund goldfields of Ravenswood and Charters Towers, and hauled to Townsville by bullock team. Cheap and hasty construction, and an air of flimsiness and impermanence pervade the town, as though puny man recognized the futility of even trying to resist the sporadic fury of the tropical elements.

For decades Townsville's population remained stagnant or grew with almost imperceptible slowness. Townsville is near enough to 1600 km away by road from the Queensland state capital, Brisbane; the main highway linking the two centres was completely sealed only in 1963. Until the completion of a new

high-level bridge over the Burdekin River in 1957, even railway communication was uncertain for long periods: with the onset of the "Wet" in January of each year, north Queensland was effectively cut off from the south. Whenever heavy rains fell over the upper reaches of the Burdekin and its tributaries, water invariably ran over the rails of the Inkerman bridge linking Ayr and Home Hill. The flooding of the river was always an occasion for nervous merriment, or sometimes suspenseful drama. Any mail-train held up at Home Hill, on the southern side of the Burdekin, had its passengers off-loaded at Carstairs for transshipment by boat across the swollen river, and practically the entire population of Home Hill turned out for the occasion. Ferrying passengers across the river was a hazardous operation because it often took place in driving rain which obscured the boats from view before they had even reached the middle of the broad stream. Two whaleboats from Townsville and a smaller one belonging to the Ayr Shire Council were the usual means of conveyance, and the safe arrival of a boatload on the opposite shore was always the signal for a spirited cheer for the oarsmen whom most onlookers described as "stout-hearted" men of "super-human" strength. However, the uncertainty of these crossings, in waters often resembling a maelstrom, led to long and unpredictable delays during which goods off the trains rotted on the river banks. Perishables, which included most foodstuffs, were either dumped into the river or let go to bargain hunters who gathered for the anticipated auction. Tomatoes might be knocked down at six pence per case, peaches at two shillings.[1]

Early growth rates in Townsville were closely tied to the general fortunes of the region, which "ebbed and flowed with the discovery and exhaustion of goldfields, boom, drought and depression in the pastoral industry, and a fluctuating sugar market".[2] Historically, Townsville became (and indeed still remains) primarily a service and distribution centre with a high proportion of its work force employed in the tertiary sector of the economy. It has provided comprehensive mercantile services, such as those of Burns Philp and Company, a firm with worldwide trading and financial connections, that commenced operations from a store in Flinders Street in 1873; the activities of the port; the sales of insurance companies, spreading over a region of 710 000 km^2; building operations; and a wide range of financial, wholesale, retail and transport services, especially those of the Great Northern division of the Queensland Government Railways.[3] Here was a town of small businessmen, lower-echelon clerks, tradesmen, skilled and unskilled workers. One



Burdekin River. The old railway bridge can just be seen entering the river at Carstairs and disappearing beneath the flood waters. Photo by courtesy of the *Courier-Mail.*

of its most characteristic sights until at least World War II was that of the railway employee, dressed in his distinctive but funereal uniform of black hat, black vest, black trousers, carrying a battered black tucker box, and pedalling to work on a battered black bike.

In 1930 Townsville's second landmark, after Castle Hill, was a capacious *Terminalia* or Indian almond tree, known locally as the "Tree of Knowledge". Under its branches men would gather after dark to listen to "orators", whom the more conservative folk labelled "agitators". The opening rallies of all political campaigns—municipal, state, federal—took place under the tree. Men in their dark blue singlets tumbled out of the bars in Flinders Street to shout comments on the loud rhetoric of the speakers. Sometimes, when the speaker was not approved of, the crowd would give him "three groans"—the reverse of three cheers. Mingled in Tom Aikens' memory with his own visions of what went on in the shadow of the Tree of Knowledge were stories from an earlier time: stories that told of organizers who had been shut out of the meat-works by the managers and who had swum crocodile-infested tidal creeks to reach the men and persuade them to join the union. It pleased Tom to find that in this soft city environment physical courage was just as important as it had been out west, that Townsvilleans were just as proud of the truculence and passion of their politics, and of their violence in action.

Indeed, if there existed anywhere a more radical, working-class environment than that of outback north Queensland where Aikens had been brought up, Townsville in 1930 may well have been it. Many of the ramblers and nomads from the west eventually ended up there. The town had also acquired a reputation for industrial anarchy that most residents traced back to "Bloody Sunday" in 1919—the riotous culmination of a meat-workers' strike in which police actually fired on workers and a number of people were injured.[4]

During the slaughter season, about a thousand men, the largest concentration of labour in Townsville, were employed by the meat-works. Wharves and railways accounted for most of the rest. The three major unions representing these workers—the Australian Meat Industry Employees' Union (AMIEU), the Waterside Workers' Federation (WWF) and the ARU—had inherited the mantle of militancy from "Red Ted" Theodore's "fighting AWA" (Amalgamated Workers' Association) when it was absorbed by the AWU in 1913.[5] Each nurtured a syndicalist mistrust of parliamentary action, each refused to recognize the

Industrial Arbitration Act of 1916, each reaffirmed its faith in direct action.[6] As early as 1917 the journal of the International Workers of the World (IWW), *Direct Action*, noted with pride that "the working class is beginning to think in these northern wilds. And by the way, when they think they act. . . ."[7]

Townsville's status after 1922 as the organizational centre of the communist movement in north Queensland gave added lustre to its growing, if not yet venerable, tradition of radicalism. The first northern branches of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA) were formed in Townsville and Cairns in September 1922; in April 1926 the CPA established its official northern headquarters in the Townsville Meatworkers' Hall. The CPA's relentless and bitter attack on the Labor Party's inflexible commitment to the arbitration system was undeniably popular among the rank and file of Townsville workers, many of whom, especially after the experience of wage reductions during the early 1920s, regarded judicial decisions as inimical to the workers' best interests.[8] The 1930s continued to be a period of "remarkable growth" for the Communist Party in Townsville, which was without parallel anywhere else in Australia.[9] The climax of this movement came in 1944 when F.W. Paterson became the first (and so far the only) communist member of an Australian parliament.[10]

From the time of its earliest historical development, the isolation of north Queensland communities from one another gave rise to what its historian has called "fierce local loyalties";[11] by the same token, north Queensland's isolation from the south, the seat of government, produced "go-it-alone patriotism"[12] and "direct-action radicalism".[13] The 1944 election which took Aikens into parliament was a manifestation of both phenomena, as indeed were two other features of the same election. One was a spectacular drop in public support for the ALP government that had ruled Queensland continuously, with but a single brief interruption, since 1915. The other was the entry into parliament of two other radicals (one of them the communist, Fred Paterson) from north Queensland seats which had been traditional ALP strongholds.[14] The 1944 election result was the more remarkable to the extent that in the entire period 1915–41 the ALP had at no stage held less than three-quarters of the state seats between Mackay and Cairns, and for three successive elections (1935, 1938 and 1941) won all nine of the electorates in the northern region.

"Go-it-alone patriotism" was aroused whenever north Queenslanders felt that Queensland governments were neglect-

ing the north. Mass defections from the ALP were one way in which they registered their disapproval, and the 1944 election was in fact the culmination of a long series of disputes going back to the 1860s. All the grievances could be summed up in the slogan that "Queen Street Government" was indifferent to the north and even contemptuous of it. The recurrent claim reached its highest pitch of intensity during the period 1941–57 when alleged state neglect of the north and inequitable northern representation in parliament were the main issues in every election.[15] Failure to establish secondary industry, failure to encourage population growth, failure to provide basic transportation and communication facilities, all were at the root of sporadic protests that the north was not receiving a fair share of public works and developmental capital. ALP governments were sensitive to northern criticism and tried to combat it. Indeed, in addition to being a party that deliberately set out to attract all classes and all interests throughout the state, the ALP was also the only consistent "northern" party. By spending loan moneys freely in north Queensland on public developmental works such as roads, bridges, harbours, sewerage, forestry, schools and other buildings, the party set out to "kill with one stone both the Separation Movement and the Country–National Party".[16] The north also received a generous allocation of Cabinet portfolios, not to mention Premierships; it had influential voices within the councils of the ALP; its major industry, sugar, was well protected. But to many in the north such attention was often interpreted as being insufficient or insincere, or both—as indeed it did seem in itself to be a tacit admission on the part of governments that the north really had been neglected.

The occasional renascence of a separatist or New State Movement was yet another way in which north Queenslanders sought to express their dissatisfaction.[17] Overall, however, the New State Movement was dissipated as a political force because both class and local loyalties transcended it.[18] To the working man, the form of society rather than the form of government was the pre-eminent issue in politics, while to the north Queenslander in Cairns or Mackay the pretensions of a separatist movement based on Townsville were arrogant and insupportable.

Until 1929, when the "aggressive and optimistic phase of political labour" in Queensland came to an end,[19] the ALP was a reformist party which, if not socialist, was nevertheless more inclined than in other states "to stress its socialist purpose".[20] Socialism in Queensland, however, was still essentially of the

utopian and gradualist, not Marxist, variety. The ALP believed, like all the utopians of the nineteenth century, that if only men would apply their reason to solving the problems of an industrial economy, if only they would wipe out man-made inequalities by letting the great natural law of brotherhood operate freely, then utopia would be within their grasp and social and economic progress would come about almost automatically.

When the ALP took office in 1915, it offered a programme of "action" on behalf of the workers and all "small men", which included the formation of state enterprises, support for small farmers, constitutional change and the introduction of social services and industrial legislation.[21] There were precedents for state enterprise in Queensland; certain utilities, notably the railways, were already publicly owned. The fledgling ALP government was no sooner in office, however, than it announced its intention of extending state ownership into any field where the public interest, in its view, would thereby be served. Over the next few years the government either purchased or inaugurated state-owned butcher shops, cattle stations, railway refreshment rooms, fish markets, trawlers, saw-mills, smelters, coal-mines, a produce agency and a hotel.[22]

All these measures were extolled as the socialist reforms of a socialist government, though they were regarded more as a means of providing competition within the capitalist system than of displacing it, for the ALP was already committed to a broad range of liberal, nationalist and multi-interest policies—"the characteristics which had won it support from the beginning".[23] The Labor government of Queensland saw nothing ironical or even inaccurate in giving the title *Socialism at Work* to a pamphlet which described its economic activities, although the government had not nationalized a single industry; its measures were not only not specifically socialist but were by no means confined to Labor governments.[24]

As well as state enterprises, the ALP government under T.J. Ryan enacted a variety of other measures which were especially popular among workers. These provided for maternity hospitals, baby clinics, a far-west health scheme, dental, medical and opthalmic treatment for school children, preference to unionists in employment, unemployment insurance, workers' accident insurance and compensation. An *Industrial Arbitration Act* also set up a tribunal with wide arbitral powers.[25] However, all of these statutes, like the state enterprises themselves, envisaged not the subversion of the capitalist system but rather its amelioration in the interests of the many rather than the few.[26]

Labor's entry into politics was thus reformist but by no means revolutionary, which seemed almost a betrayal to the more impassioned saviours of society. To these, it was no business of the Labor Party to convert the heady excitement of social revolution into "the drab compromise of piecemeal reforms".[27]

This gradualist and parliamentary approach to the solution of social and economic problems was mainly attributable to the growing ascendancy of conservative trade unions, notably the AWU, within the power structure of the ALP. Indeed the AWU was more than just a dominant force in both the industrial and political wings of the ALP; its executive, along with the Queensland Cabinet and the QCE of the ALP, formed what could only be described as "an interlocking directorate".[28] The AWU rapidly attained this position after the Brisbane tramway strike of 1912 which broke the power of the Australian Labor Federation (ALF), up till then the most "socialist" of labour organizations to the extent that it advocated state ownership of the means of production. In the following year it amalgamated with another militant union, the AWA and, largely under the control of the former officials of the AWA in Queensland, the new combined union took a non-militant path.[29] Deeply committed to arbitration in industrial affairs, complaisant towards the Labor governments in all fields of economic and political policy, the AWU came to exemplify what was soon universally acknowledged as moderate Labor orthodoxy throughout Queensland.

Orthodoxy of this kind, however, which many saw as the sacrifice of idealism to realism, of dogma to expediency, of socialism to capitalism, was repugnant to an important section of the labour movement, particularly in north Queensland, where ideological fervour and a tradition of direct-action militancy had imbued workers with a sense of being in the vanguard of Australian socialism. The phenomenon has not gone unnoticed: the way of life of the back country fostered attitudes that were "egalitarian, self-confident, independent, and socially radical";[30] the Queensland bush unions had been "nourished on William Lane's vision of the working man's paradise as well as on the realities of class war";[31] the rural working-class exhibited a "manly independence" whose obverse side was a levelling, egalitarian collectivism and whose sum was comprised in the concept of mateship.[32] All of these observations by Australians might seem merely coincidental or perhaps even incestuous were it not for the corroboration of an outsider, an American, who extrapolates from the experience of many nations to demonstrate

a universal correlation between the social isolation and economic insecurity of bush workers, on the one hand, and their "strong group-consciousness and solidarity", their militancy and radicalism, on the other.[33]

From the time of the first strikes on the goldfields of Charters Towers in the 1870s, workers' confrontations with employers were marked by "a continuing conflict of interests".[34] There was a "drift" towards "more and more radicalism and socialism".[35] In 1890–91 the Australia-wide maritime and shearers' strikes brought widespread disruption throughout north Queensland.[36] The north was heavily dependent on sea transport with the south, and the seamen's strike of 1890 provoked resentment and sometimes bloody dissension throughout north Queensland; it was actually the first of many disputes in which striking seamen and wharf labourers found themselves at odds, not only with farmers who wanted their produce moved, but also with townspeople who became alarmed at the depletion of their larders. The shearers' strike was contested with even greater bitterness and left the trade union movement weakened but belligerent.[37]

The foundation of the AWA by E.G. Theodore and W. McCormack, two future ALP Premiers, in 1907 ushered in a new era of radicalism. Although originally a miners' organization whose activities were confined to the fields of Herberton, Irvinebank and Mungana, the AWA thrived in its new metamorphosis and soon earned a reputation as "Red Ted's Fighting AWA". In 1910 it absorbed the Amalgamated Sugar Workers' Union, thereby again swelling its ranks by the addition of most sugar workers throughout north Queensland. The AWA eagerly espoused the cause of its new protégés, promptly found itself at loggerheads with the sugar industry employers and called a stoppage of all workers in July 1911. Fighting broke out between the strikers and "free labour" engaged by the mills, and in this way sugar workers also became assimilated to the tradition of rebelliousness in the north. It was a tradition that Theodore attempted to articulate in 1912: "Men who are dissatisfied and have come to the conclusion that the ordinary methods of improving their conditions or securing redress of their grievances are not suitable to the occasion, have to resort to other means, even to violence."[38]

The tradition was an amalgam of two regional peculiarities. On the one hand, isolation and localism bred self-reliance, independence of spirit, the sort of "irreverent" radicalism "that chose a man irrespective of his label and enjoyed cocking a snook at respectable party politicians",[39] or that exhibited "a contempt

for parliamentarianism, a reliance on spontaneous action, an image of an atomized society based on the free association of producers, a moral conviction that property was theft".[40] This was a radicalism that was naturally tinged with anarchism and syndicalism because it arose in an already "atomized" society, a region that consisted of nothing more than a collection of remote, self-contained communities. On the other hand, the very nature of most employment in the north, which was seasonal, irregular and itinerant or semi-itinerant in the mines and the bush or on sugar farms, wharves and railways, itself bred a "conditioned recklessness" and "undisciplined vehemence" that merely reinforced the primary influences of history and geography.[41]

2

The Education of a Radical

The several elements of north Queensland's radical tradition fused in the upbringing and political education of Tom Aikens, who was born on 28 April 1900 in the prosperous little pastoral town of Hughenden and moved to Charters Towers in 1904 when his education was due to begin. Then, with its suburbs, the most populous centre in Queensland outside Brisbane, Charters Towers' decline from the position of premier goldfield in Queensland had only just begun. Over the years the town had contrived a certain façade of *nouveau riche* elegance and respectability. Its two main streets were lined with a number of solid public buildings featuring pediments, porticoes and painted cast-iron pillars of characteristic "Victorian gusto".[1] But its rude mining origins were also plainly on view. The town sprawled graceless, unplanned and devoid of most public utilities. There was no street lighting until 1890 and no water supply until late December of that year. The spreading suburbs of miners' cottages, usually of four rooms with front verandah and rear lean-to kitchen were invariably made of wood; so, too, were shops, offices and other buildings. The heavy horse-drawn traffic of the mining industry stirred up clouds of dust from the unsealed streets. The bare countryside had been stripped for miles around of its scanty tree supply for mine props and fuel, while the large numbers of goats ate every piece of greenery. Rubbish was thrown into the streets from houses and, even in the town's centre from shops; dead horses were dumped in parks and on the town's outskirts; refuse and drainage from some hotels, halls and public establishments went straight into the outside gutter. It was no wonder the Council paid a bounty on dead rats, and in fact a case of bubonic plague occurred in October 1900.[2]

However, the distinctive ethos of Charters Towers consisted not in the opulent ostentation of the Stock Exchange nor even

in the noisome squalor of its streets. The town seethed with mining activity, long placing Charters Towers in the forefront of working-class militancy in north Queensland. From the time of its most formative years in the late 1880s and early 1890s, trade unionists had been aggressively anti-capitalistic. This was attributable not merely to the collective vigour of miners' attempts to remedy their grievances but also to the exceptional quality of leadership which life on the goldfields invariably attracted and engendered. In Charters Towers, several were confirmed socialists, however inchoate their theories; some indeed were "almost of a Marxist persuasion".[3] Not that a miner's life was all that grim. Wages were high compared with those in other semi-skilled trades; the promise of wealth was not only everybody's dream but everybody's possibility. Indeed, good wages, plenty of work, an adequate standard of living, a sense of independence and the chance of striking it rich produced neither sullenness nor hopelessness but brash, egalitarian self-confidence.[4]

Class distinction never had a chance to ossify except in the relatively innocuous form of social snobbery, which was based solely on the possession of wealth. A boy like Tom Aikens had plenty of friends from rich families, especially during school hours and in football scrimmages. It was just that working-class lads were not expected at garden parties in the big houses and moreover never tried to go, not even when there was a gate fee of sixpence for charity.

That was certainly how Tom Aikens remembered it. Although his father, John, early forsook the responsibilities of parenthood for a life of bush vagabondage, leaving Tom's mother, Emily, to scrub clothes for the rich, Tom lived comfortably enough in a society where sufficient means filtered to the lower classes to at least generate an optimistic outlook. Prosperity was the greatest leveller of all. In Charters Towers, it had so blunted the cutting edge of militant trade unionism that "it was quite the done thing for men and women, and of course boys and girls, to stand on the kerb and touch the forelock, as the saying went, to the Plants and the Millicans as they drove by in their posh sulkies".[5] Tea might be no more than a sausage and a chunk of bread, but there were always a few lollies and threepences for cheerful lads delivering neatly wrapped parcels of laundry after school. That done, there was still time for Tom to indulge his greatest pleasure, which was to pore over the comics and schoolboy magazines on the racks outside Willmett's shop, for the young Tom relished words and the treasures they unlocked.

He loved school because the work of reading and writing his wondrous English language was what he loved doing most; for the rest, he relied on a prodigious memory, leech-like tenacity and a quick intelligence—and it seemed to suffice. Our student's attention was momentarily seduced by the rational design of arithmetic and Latin, but the glimmer was insufficiently bright to distract a mind that was not so much lazy as already preoccupied with other things, a mind that was speculative rather than logical, romantic rather than rational. Of course the "flogging master" occasionally interrupted Tom's literary reveries; once, too, his headmaster, J.G. Bayley, put him on the mat, first for misappropriating state funds by the extravagant purchase of a sixpenny pen, then for trying to evade the consequences of his impetuosity by a panic-stricken disavowal of the crime. For some reason, Tom never forgot his headmaster's lecture, perhaps because his words were strangely redolent of tolerant affection and therefore unaccustomed to a schoolboy's ears: "You have told a lie, and I can prove it to be a lie. As you go through life, never tell a lie if someone can prove it to be a lie. He didn't say 'don't lie'."[6]

The boy's body and mind were well nourished by the devotion of a mother who for ten years scrubbed and ironed from before dawn, but he entered into adolescence with some unavoidable emotional scars. Not only did he never see his father, but after 1910 he saw his mother only at Christmas-time. Tom experienced the sort of deprivation and insecurity which often fosters, as every psychologist now tells us, a sense of wretched persecution or a self-assertive aggressiveness, or sometimes, depending on the individual's capacity to absorb the shock, an unstable mixture of both. And in fact Tom's most memorable brush with his headmaster over the sixpenny pen had occurred because he was already a ward of the state. Not that he was abandoned; his mother merely grasped the chance of making better money in the hotels of the west, where hosts of rural workers and railway navvies took their only pleasure, and regularly sent back more money than she had ever made in a year of back-breaking, mind-numbing toil in Charters Towers. There, Tom was now brought up by one of his mother's former boarders, Emily Faires, in the company of her young son, Stanley, and his own younger sister, Eva; his elder brother, Ted, had also left on a liberating adventure around the world as the companion of an old English parson, Benjamin John Smith. Moreover, the influences of an insecure family life were probably deepened by Tom's upbringing in the Roman Catholic Church

which was permeated by the peculiarly intensive traditions of the Irish immigrants. Centuries of unhappy historical experience had produced a people who were defensive yet truculent, gentle yet vengeful, submissive yet contumacious, tragic yet exuberant —and politically obsessive.

Certainly Tom's truculence came to the fore when he lost his first job. Barely fifteen years old, he had joined the Post Office a year before as a telegram boy and counted his blessings of eighteen shillings per week. Then the time came for the medical examination that would confirm his appointment. The verdict was desolating. Not only was he not the hale and hearty fellow he thought he was, but he also suffered from an incurable kidney complaint and could not be expected to survive his teenage years. Neither sheer incredulity nor youthful resilience, however, is sufficient to account for Tom's reaction to the news. Exploding in anger, he accused the offending and startled physician, old Dr Streeter, of being "a vicious, vindictive snob" who wanted only to deprive a poor working-class boy of his job.[7]

The macabre news made Tom's search for security seem cruelly irrelevant, though for a time he tried to find it in the garb of a white silk shirt, a brass tiepin and clerical respectability as an office boy in Buckland's. It could not last, however. An office mausoleum in a moribund town was hardly the place for a dying man. So, less than a year later, he made the decision to quicken whatever life remained in him and sever the few tenuous bonds that tied him to Charters Towers. There was really only one place to go. It was the place to which his grandfather had emigrated from Ireland; it was where his mother had been born and now worked; every day more and more families in Charters Towers were leaving to go there. It was Eldorado in the west.

Charters Towers, while it flourished, had radiated a spirit of optimism and aggressive egalitarianism. With its decline, "this direct influence fell away to be replaced by an indirect influence diffused throughout the north" by the large numbers who left.[8] Egalitarianism aside, few at that time had greater need of optimism than Tom Aikens.

On the way he tarried for a while as a roustabout in the shearing shed of Oxton Downs station outside Julia Creek and took out his first union ticket with the AWU. This was now 1916. Labour leaders had long extolled the virtues of the shearers and itinerant workers of north Queensland. They acknowledged the workers' great indebtedness to the "ramblers, bohemians and nomads" of the west for much of the industrial

organization of the labour movement. The men who rambled from place to place, from one state to another, were often men who had learned their roving habits through oppression, through unsuitable or unbearable conditions. And in 1916 the nomads were still carving out the destiny of the more militant of Labor's industrial associations: "The strength of many a union today is the result of the work of the rambler. . . . What a difference between [the city workman] and the average waterside worker, the meat worker, or the shearer or miner. . . . It is farcical to speak to these of the loss sustained by a stoppage of work. They are always stopping, their work is intermittent; being such, they become independent and self-reliant."[9] So Aikens absorbed the "rebellious spirit" of the nomads and the ramblers, though, to be sure, the shearers' conditions of work, at least at Oxton Downs, were hardly what he would have described as "unsuitable" or "unbearable". Mused Tom: "It was heaven—there were three enormous meals a day, and tea, cocoa, sandwiches and brownies for in-betweens and afters—seven or eight feeds a day. I had a great time; I never thought there could be so much food."[10]

And so the young and intrepid Candide came to Cloncurry where, in an atmosphere of optimistic camaraderie among the ramblers of the Australian Railways Union, he finally found his security but lost his innocence. Cloncurry was then, and still is, a town of exquisite individuality, and Aikens' arrival in it was suitably idiosyncratic—in the dead of night by KB van, or the drovers' compartment of a wagon in an empty cattle train. Lying on the western periphery of the grasslands and black-soil plains of tropical western Queensland, where undulating hills and rocky outcrops begin to rise and form a stunted, eroded plateau of red, pink and ochre—a Pre-Cambrian wilderness which is among the oldest geological formations on earth—Cloncurry has been called "the scene of more unfulfilled promises than any other town in Australia".[11] Of its climate, even a boastful citizenry on a signal historical occasion seemed unable to rise to the usual heights of cheerful, self-congratulatory hyperbole: a jubilee brochure merely states, more in wonderment than pride, that here "Australia's record temperature was reached—127° F".[12] It makes no mention at all of the red and swirling dust which clogs the nostrils and lacerates the throat, of the leaden and omnipresent sun which shrivels the eyes and bows the head, of the eerie and encircling isolation which warps the senses and sometimes befuddles the mind. One young traveller a few years before Aikens left an impression that

many have shared. He journeyed 3200 km by steamer from Melbourne to Townsville, 480 km by rail to Winton (the railway did not reach Cloncurry till 1908), then boarded the Cloncurry coach—Cobb & Company's seven-horse behemoth top heavy with mails and baggage—and lumbered west for two days and a night, "watching hour after hour with bloodshot eyes the flat horizon of glaring sky and bare earth, stretching cramped legs and drinking hot tea in the bough sheds that served as stages, until at last he saw in the distance a streak of gleaming water —the mirage of thousands of broken bottles by the McKinlay pub".[13]

Tom moved in with his uncle, a railwayman, his aunt and his grandmother, the last a crusty matriarch who still refused to ride in George Reid's taxi because he had scabbed in the great strike of '91. Like almost everyone else they lived in a little four-room hut whose open verandah, propped up by wooden posts and draped with hessian to shield it from the molten sun, seemed an incongruous addition to an otherwise iron structure in which families stoically baked. There was no sewerage, no running water, no electricity. Tom's aunt cooked the meals with a wet towel wound around her head, butter dripped in a tin safe that was optimistically swathed in damp sugar bags, red dust and a myriad of sticky flies settled everywhere, although perhaps it stretches poetic licence a trifle far to say that "at evening, when the kerosene lamps threw the shadows of a hundred moths into the corrugations of the walls, they read newspapers that were as stale as the lives they lived".[14]

The conditions of life were certainly raw, but "stale" they most decidedly were not—at least for the men folk. 1916 was in fact the year of Cloncurry's efflorescence, its *fin de siècle*. It was then the foremost copper field in Australia and its mines and smelters employed nearly 2200 men. Cloncurry itself was the hub of a railway network whose spokes ran out to places like Quamby, Kajabbi, Mount Elliott, Dobbyn, Selwyn, Ballara, Malbon, Kuridala, Duchess and Mount Cuthbert, and the population from Mount Cuthbert in the north to Duchess in the south was probably close to 7000.[15] The 'Curry was also the district's metropolis, providing an abundant and heady variety of culture, sport, alcohol, sex and politics.

Culture was music, especially singing, a western tradition whose origins have been traced, at least in part, to the influence of Welsh and Cornish miners, originally on the goldfields of Charters Towers.[16] In the less staid cultural ambiance of Cloncurry, despite the early arrival of several "professors of

music",[17] the discipline of choral singing was transmuted into the exuberant spontaneity of the "smoke concert". Most of the fifteen hotels in Cloncurry had at least one smoke concert each week when everyone gathered around the piano and most had a solo turn. "Good ballads" were expected of those who had the best singing voices—Tom Aikens was one—and their performances were in much demand at all the pubs.[18]

Sport was football, of all physical recreations the one which seemed most attuned to the temperament of the bush workers west of the Great Divide, a temperament that combined manliness with mateship, a sense of independence with the collectivist "team spirit" that men should be loyal to the men with whom they lived and worked.[19] Aikens threw himself into football with as much verve as into his singing; indeed the two nicknames he had by now acquired on the playing fields of Charters Towers and Cloncurry—"Bull" and "Enjo" (the latter a bush diminutive of "Energy")—together evoked a deft caricature of the grown man: 183 cm and over 100 kg of massive physique and truculent mien, lusty, ebullient, impulsive, recalcitrant.

Alcohol in Cloncurry was rum with a beer chaser (or vice versa, depending on the number you had had), and it took forty hotels in the district to slake the thirst of the 2000-odd miners. Of course there were also some transient pastoral workers and the resident or semi-nomadic railwaymen. The Cloncurry branch of the ARU, for instance, had 185 members, 62 of whom lived in Cloncurry itself, and there were railway gangs in Quamby, Kajabbi, Malbon, Duchess, Kuridala and Ballara.[20] Aikens did not drink much at first, or not much more than the awe-inspiring average that was commonplace in the west, but with footy mostly on Sundays there were better things to do on Saturday afternoons than to sit at home and fry. So he would drift up to the pub and join his cronies. "If you did not immediately get a skinful of beer, you sat down and played '500' or euchre or whatever was the popular game at the time and after you had had four or five horehounds, even though you had made up your mind to go on the square you got tired of drinking horehound and switched over to the drinking of beer and so at the end of the afternoon toddled off home more or less under the weather. . . . "[21]

Sex was plentiful and manifested itself in all the usual bizarre, mostly amusing ways. Indeed, Cloncurry's notoriety as the Sodom and Gomorrah of the west was the more enhanced for its easygoing tolerance of the district's only brothels. Prostitutes

were excluded from the satellite mining townships, but "an army of gay girls"[22] found secure habitation and continuous custom in the Afghan camp and Chinatown, just over the ridge and across Coppermine Creek on the outskirts of town.

Then there was politics, which the people of Cloncurry took rather more seriously than their sex, grog, footy or singing. As a matter of fact, Tom's very first day in the town was Saturday, 28 October 1916, when Australians everywhere went to the polls in the first conscription referendum. His ablutions in the rain tub done, Tom put on a suit to look his spruce best and wandered into town to give it the once-over and look for a job. He got as far as Mrs Matthew's café when suddenly a big fellow lurched out of the laneway and lunged at another pedestrian with a formidable sapling about two metres long and eight cm thick, knocking him as flat as a camel's foot and staving in a few ribs.

"What did you hit him like that for?" inquired an aghast young Tom.

"What did I hit him like that for? Don't be a moron, sonny, he's a bloody conscriptionist!"

Still reflecting on the moral of that ugly encounter, Tom had not walked much further when he saw another bloke come out of the Imperial Hotel with a .32 rifle, take careful aim at a little fox terrier dog and shoot him dead in his tracks. The dog was wearing a pretty blue sash with the words "Vote Yes" inscribed on it.[23] Of course, our callow youth was witnessing the culmination of a "fiery debate" which polarized Australian opinion and in which workers went beyond a mere questioning of the conduct and ends of the Great War to articulate "their inchoate prejudices and beliefs about the social order".[24] The anti-conscription campaign in Queensland had been initiated by labour unions, and the working-class almost unanimously rejected the militaristic arguments of Prime Minister Hughes. Cloncurry, like other "confined communities", offered a paradigm of divisions which were "sharply and bitterly highlighted, building up a reserve of ill-feeling".[25]

Mainly on the strength of a rather too flowery and effulgent testimonial from Jack Dunn, the manager of Buckland's in Charters Towers, Tom got his fourth job in a grocery store and found himself posted as pay clerk—"damn near sub-accountant" —to the company's branch in Selwyn. All the youthful effrontery he could muster, however, could not conceal his woeful lack of training for the job and he lasted precisely one week. Back in Cloncurry, he decided to take his uncle's advice and fill in time between jobs as a cleaner in the Railways Department. He

reported for work on 11 January 1917 and filled in time for the next twenty-seven years. For the first ten, until he passed his engine driver's examination in 1925, Tom not only cleaned and fired steam locos but completed an exacting political apprenticeship in the Cloncurry branch of the ARU as Vice-President representing cleaners, Acting Secretary, President and Delegate to the Northern District Committee of the ARU, Secretary of the Cloncurry branch of the ALP, Councillor and Deputy Chairman of the Cloncurry Shire Council.[26]

Of course nothing was more natural in the vibrant and volatile atmosphere of Cloncurry than that Aikens should have found politics infectious. "Politics was in everyone's blood; it was in the very air we breathed."[27] But if genius is the faculty of everlasting concentration upon one thing, it seemed unlikely then that Tom was destined for a political career and even less that he would one day become a politician's politician, for the simple fact was that too many other things also interested him. Paradoxically, it was this very gusto, this sheer zest for living which eventually provided him, although in an ironic, almost tragic way, with an opportunity for the crystallization of a definite political ambition. In 1921, just a few weeks after his marriage on 16 February to Margaret Ann Myers, the daughter of a Ravenswood miner, in the little Anglican Bush Brotherhood parish church of St James, he collapsed in a cataleptic fit—a paroxysm of too much living. "I was spending every other night in a pub, singing for all I was worth, and naturally having quite a few beers as well, I was playing good football and training hard, I was working like a navvie during the day, I had just fallen in love and was getting about three or four hours' sleep every night—I was doing everything that a young man hardly of age shouldn't have been doing."[28]

The doctor told him that he had "athlete's heart" and that, although the chances of reasonable physical recovery were good, they would depend on his not doing everything he loved doing. Morbidly, Tom accepted nearly two years of enforced convalescence, a large part of it spent in the salubrious and conspicuously less febrile environment of Bowen. These two years, however, proved the most decisive in his life, for his recreations were limited to reading, learning the techniques of politicking from a mentor who took him as protégé, and practising and perfecting the art of oratory.

Back in Cloncurry after the interlude in Bowen, Tom befriended Frank Jacomb whose little iron hut on a rise near the Aikens', almost the last house in town on the Selwyn road,

contained the most extraordinary collection of books in Cloncurry. For hours the two men would talk or just read, and at nightfall Tom invariably went home with an armful of books to continue reading by the light of a hurricane lamp on the verandah of his house. His appetite for books, as for food, had remained insatiable, but, like the true Sybarite, those tastes were by now clearly defined: Voltaire, Defoe, Dickens, Carlyle, Macaulay, H.B. Spencer, Jack London, Robert Ingersoll. Tom fairly gorged himself on a repast of secular reformism, social criticism, political iconoclasm and agnosticism—a diet that was clear, witty, ironic and satirical yet simultaneously lush, chimerical, sentimental and apocalyptic. His predilections were reinforced by a regular reading of *The Militant* and *The Advocate*, ARU holy writ, whose pages in those years were interlarded with the millenial and often saccharine visions of Robert Ingersoll and Eugene Debs:

> I see a world where thrones have crumbled and where kings are dust; the aristocracy of idleness has perished from the earth. I see a world without a slave. Man at last is free. Nature's forces have by science been enslaved. I see a world of peace; adorned with every form of art, with music's myriad voices thrilled; while lips are rich with words of love and truth—a world in which no exile sighs, no prisoner mourns; a world on which the gibbet's shadow does not fall; where work and worth go hand in hand. I see a race without disease of flesh or brain, shapely and fair; the married harmony of form and function and as I look life lengthens, joy deepens, love canopies the earth; and over all in the great dome shines the eternal star of human hope.[29]

In such ways as these, too, socialist ideas seeped through to Aikens and his comrades, colouring their attitudes and slowly providing them with political policies. Above all, they provided unionists with a conviction that their struggles were just, thereby gradually stimulating them to action. The link between trade-union experience and the socialist ideal was "the concept of co-operative action for the collective good".[30]

Aikens had already delivered his first public oration two years before. This was at a political meeting in front of George Stanley's hotel in Selwyn when a group of raucous but indulgent miners invited the brash "Enjo" to get up and have a go. He needed no further encouragement and leapt on to the back of a horse-drawn lorry which was illuminated by a single kerosene lantern on a table and the flickering glow of an acetylene gas lamp on the hotel verandah. Choosing a text from the *Communist Manifesto*, the ever-eager and over-confident Tom had

not gone far, however, when he realized that he had never given much thought to what the workers should do after they had awakened and arisen. The audience, at first flummoxed, soon dissolved in titters of ridicule. Still, the crestfallen Tom had experienced his first thrill of upturned faces and, only momentarily dismayed, thought more about his lesson than his mortification: know enough about your subject to keep talking, speak clearly so that the audience will know what you are saying, and speak to your audience, neither down to them nor over their heads, so that they will understand what you are saying. Of course he also reflected, now from bitter experience, on the wisdom of Voltaire: that when all other weapons have failed to pierce a man's armour it will never withstand the barbed lance of ridicule.[31]

"The secret of efficient expression in oratory", wrote Eugene Debs in *The Militant*, to the delight of at least one enthralled reader, "is in having something efficient to express and being so filled with it that it expresses itself. The choice of words is not important, since efficient expression, the result of efficient thinking, chooses its own words, moulds and fashions its own sentences, and creates a diction suited to its own purposes."[32] There was also style of delivery, Tom noted, to which the key was a sort of fervent sincerity. The greatest orators, according to Debs, were consumed by a "sacred fire" which aroused them, flashed from their eyes and rolled from their inspired lips in torrents of eloquence. Finally, there was subject matter, the very plinth of oratory. Just as unhesitantingly, Debs had no doubts about what that should be: "the most thrilling and inspiring oratory, the most powerful and impressive eloquence is the voice of the disinherited, the oppressed, the suffering and submerged; it is the voice of poverty and misery, of rags and crusts, of wretchedness and despair. . . ."[33]

Aikens practised endlessly on himself, in the rain tub, out in the paddock, in the grimy dankness of a loco ash pit. His reward came in 1922 when Johnny Mullan, then state member of parliament for Flinders, formerly federal senator and state member for Charters Towers, whom Tom vividly remembered from the street-corner meetings he had watched as a boy, was so impressed by "Enjo's" vote of thanks at a Cloncurry ALP soirée that he invited Tom to accompany him on his tours of the electorate and sit beside him on the hustings. There was no more rapt or diligent pupil and Tom soon learned the refinements of his art. A few simple techniques were enough.

The first was a way of dealing with interjectors, those who

threatened to disrupt or take over a meeting. They had at all costs to be squashed, whether by ridicule, simulated anger, any form of character assassination short of legal defamation, or sheer brazen impertinence. Mostly these strategems worked. Sometimes they did not, as on one occasion in the days before Mount Isa had its water supply, when Mullan, Aikens and Walter Rose, Chairman of the Cloncurry Shire Council, went out to pacify the thirsty miners. The meeting was an angry one from the start and one persistent interjector had finally had enough: "It's all bloody right for you Johnny Mullan to come out here and tell us what great blokes you are—you and Rose and that bloody Aikens—but you're living on champagne, pork and chicken and we're out here without a drop of water, dying like frogs." Mullan's goading retort, "Well you've still got a croak in you anyway!" brought the meeting to an abrupt end in a mêlée of flying fists and exiting bodies.[34]

A second technique was what Mullan and all other bush orators knew as the "white bullock" trick. This meant that an audience, like the white bullock in the slaughter yard who led reluctant beasts up the race on to the floor where the knocker-down was waiting to hit them on the head with a sledge-hammer, could fairly be led up to, but not beyond, the farthest limits of public gullibility. Tom noted that it seemed to be a variation on his old headmaster's advice, "never tell a lie if someone can prove it to be a lie". "Now Mullan was completely unscrupulous, but he was wise enough not to be a blatant liar; he would make up all sorts of outrageous facts and figures to prove his point, he would exaggerate quite unblushingly, but he never really told a lie that anyone in his audience would ever be likely to prove was a lie."[35]

Third, it was important, never to be too loquacious which "was always Jack Duggan's biggest failing; he liked the sound of his own voice"; for the public's attentiveness was fragile and brief. And fourth, the surest way of holding an audience's attention was with humour, especially the naughty but not too salacious quip. "George Pollock, who was, I would say, the most pompous and pedantic speaker I have ever heard, once came to Cloncurry, and in reply to some question at a meeting said, 'It would indeed be presumptuous of me to express an opinion on such a paradoxical matter.' Well, that was the first time anyone had ever heard the word 'paradoxical', and for years afterwards it remained a joke among the working-class. Whenever any politicians came to town, someone would always ask a question beginning with 'What do you think of the *paradox* of such-and-

such?'—anything just to get the word in. Once they did it to Johnny Mullan and he said, 'Now there's a good word that I learned only the other day, and I'm going to give you the best example of a paradox that I know. If you put your hand on a woman's thigh and slowly move it upwards, the nearer you get to the top the closer you get to the bottom.' And he brought the house down."[36]

Aikens found plenty of opportunities to deploy his newly acquired talent in the chamber of the Cloncurry Shire Council after a Labor team gained control of it in 1924. Of a total of thirty-nine motions or proposals before the Council at its inaugural meeting on 20 May, Aikens initiated twenty-two.[37] The Labor councillors did what they could to transform the local authority into a political forum and to translate their ideological beliefs into practical policies. Among other things, Cloncurry severed its connections with the North Queensland Employers' Association[38] and banished the Union Jack from all shire flagstaffs.[39] But they also learned the very democratic lesson that power tended to be evanescent, that it was never absolute, and that government carried with it the responsibility of moderating a myriad divergent interests in the community. It was frustrating but probably salutary to try and reconcile the hope of changing the face of the earth overnight with the urgency of putting a corduroy crossing across the Cloncurry River or ameliorating "the strong and objectionable odours" in the slop-water pits. Still, power had its compensations. The overshadowing concern of the Shire Council during those years was the controlled settlement and development of "the greatest Australian mine of this century".[40] The initial danger was that the Mount Isa field would be monopolized by a few wealthy promoters, but as a result of protests from the Cloncurry Shire Council and the local ALP branch the Labor government of the day decided that no one except the discoverers should hold more than four ha of the field.[41]

For his second term on the Council, Aikens was elected Deputy Chairman. He had undoubtedly left his imprint, for when the Railways Department transferred him to Townsville early in 1930 his colleagues took the unusual step of farewelling him at the public expense and placing on permanent record what is probably the longest and most fulsome eulogy in the annals of the Cloncurry Shire Council.[42]

3

Party and Worker: Domestic Tribulations

The years during which Aikens held elected office in Cloncurry were also characterized by a progressive disillusionment among workers with the ALP state government that ruled in Brisbane. When the ALP eventually fell from power in 1929, after fourteen years continuously in office, this was because large numbers of its hitherto loyal supporters deserted it.[1] The root cause of the problem was a twofold one. On the one hand, some sections of the labour movement deplored the snail's pace at which socialization appeared to be proceeding; on the other hand, a much larger core of workers discovered to its chagrin that the Labor government was not only not the model employer they had expected it to be but even a downright unsympathetic one.[2]

Nowhere in Queensland were these feelings more pronounced than in the north and in the ranks of the railway workers. After the AWU absorbed the AWA in 1913 and set a fixed course of moderation and arbitration, the spearhead of opposition within the labour movement to ALP government policies was soon seen to be the ARU and several other militant trade unions. Indeed, as early as 1919 railwaymen were denouncing their employer for bureaucratic "injustice, pin-pricking and tyranny".[3] For the next fifty years, from 1918 to 1970, the ARU continued to be led by two men, Tim Moroney and Frank Nolan, who were "left-wing oriented", though not communist, "vigorous" in their beliefs, "frequently sounding like communists", and forever proselytizing an ideological position which was "one of socialism with strong Marxist overtones".[4] Increasingly the government responded by stigmatizing them as "revolutionaries" and "communists".

The tone of official ALP denunciation of left-wing militancy was first set by "Red Ted" Theodore after he became Premier. "Personally," he said, "I am not going to truckle to any

influences outside or inside Parliament merely to retain my position. . . . I am not going to be stampeded into adopting a course of action that I think unwise, impracticable, and unwarranted. . . . Responsible government ceases if irresponsibles dictate its policy."[5] To ARU stalwarts, however, that sort of rationalization was nothing but highfalutin sophistry, for it was also an admission of Theodore's willingness, if necessary, to betray his working-class origins and sell out his comrades. To some, like the young, starry-eyed Aikens, who watched Theodore's *volte-face* with growing cynicism and disdain, the only explanation was human corruptibility. Observed Tom, "there were men who came up the hard way themselves, living in shacks and suffering with the workers, but, you can't feed corn to a brumby, and as soon as they got into good positions they forgot about the workers and only mixed with the upper crust. A man goes into parliament, a working man in thought, deed and dress, and the next time you see him he's dressed in a yellow pullover, tartan socks and carrying a bag of golf clubs."[6]

Tom himself had no use for such ephemera, for society's temptations, its honours, its baubles, its pretty pleasures. At the time, 1924, he was much more impressed with Robert Ingersoll's counsel that the worthy, useful man must resist all longings to pin upon his breast "distinction's worthless badge". Indeed the more Tom thought about it, the more he agreed that social gewgaws were worthless except perhaps to the man who was himself worthless. And not only the temptations of this world had to be shunned. His own Roman Catholic Church and all organized religions were froth and nonsense. A lot of people in Cloncurry whom Tom accosted with his new beliefs found it difficult to withstand the devastating logic of his beery declamations that the immaculate conception was "a biological impossibility" and the resurrection "an astronomical absurdity". He also abruptly broke off an encounter with freemasonry, whose mysteries and medical benefits momentarily held him in thrall, upon the discovery that men were prepared to degrade themselves with "ineffable Mumbo Jumbo" in order to gain social acceptance and respectability. All this Tom accomplished by incessant reading, by never going to bed without a book in his hands, by a vain, even truculent, arrogance in wanting to know what he knew his mates did not, and by an inconquerable self-esteem in wanting to know, above all, what he himself did not yet know.

On the whole, incipient working-class disaffection with the

Labor government—a phenomenon that has been variously attributed to "the contradictions and conflicts of loyalty",[7] "the realities of which politicians are conscious and those that unionists experience",[8] and "the differences between the practical and the utopian socialists"[9]—remained in abeyance under the Ryan government. Workers nodded their assent to the government's claim that it had introduced "the most sweeping list" of legislative reforms yet achieved in the history of the state during a similar period of time.[10] It surfaced, however, under Ryan's successor, E.G. Theodore.

For a time, the sheer momentum of change brought significant new reforms. Aikens recalls that, in the 1920s, "a worker just had to be a member of the ALP. It was the only party that offered you any salvation. The other party was nothing."[11] A mere glance at the range and ramification of Labor legislation makes it easy to understand why workers should have felt this way. There were the *Unemployed Workers Insurance Act*, *Workers Compensation Act*, amendments to the *Local Authorities Act* (under which Aikens and many other Labor men first entered local government), *Primary Producers Organization Act* and, probably most radical of all, the abolition of the Upper House in the Queensland parliament.[12] However, Theodore's failure to tap the London money market as a result of his government's expressed interest in increasing rents on pastoral leases, marked the beginning of the ALP's "almost obsessional fixation", no longer with people but with fiscal economy.[13]

By 1921 prices for almost all Queensland exports had fallen sharply on world markets, unemployment was rising, taxation had risen to a level beyond which the government felt it could not go, a number of state enterprises were proving a costly drain, and Theodore came to the conclusion that he had no option but to cut costs drastically.[14] In February 1922 the Arbitration Court pared the basic wage from £4.5.0 to £4; in July the Public Service Commissioner successfully applied for a wage reduction affecting all public service employees. The government simultaneously announced the abandonment of several large-scale schemes for railway, land and industrial development, as well as the shelving of various social service projects.[15]

The howls of protest within the labour movement were so clamant that in March 1923 the Labor-in-Politics convention came within only two votes of insisting that the government raise the basic wage by parliamentary action; it did vote, which was tantamount to issuing an instruction, that the government legislate for a forty-four-hour week. But in December the

Premier confounded the labour movement by announcing that fiscal responsibility ruled out any possibility of implementing the convention's decision. Instead, the workers would have to pull up their socks and demonstrate their "industrial impressiveness". When Theodore finally prevailed on the London financiers to change their minds, although only at the cost of promising that his government would reverse its policy on pastoral rents, the news convinced a great many workers in Queensland that their Premier had succumbed to "the aristocratic embrace".[16]

The stony indifference, even hostility, of governments towards the workers' just claims, also became apparent, at least in working-class eyes, in the appalling conditions of work, which not only failed to improve but visibly deteriorated. On the railways, for instance, working conditions were little short of primitive. Tom Aikens' job as a cleaner each day was to coal two locos, fire the engines (if necessary with wood he himself had to find, fell and chop even one or two kilometres away from the yard), clean out all the ash pits, sweep the railway quarters, rouse the train crews from their cross-legged canvas stretchers and make their breakfast—all for 5s.9d per day.[17] Merely riding a train was in itself a hazardous and hair-raising occupation. Engines and wagons jumped and jerked along on flimsy rails which were buckled from the heat and often anchored to nothing more substantial than sleepers on bare earth. Locomotive crews lived like rats on leaking ships, always ready to leap overboard. Once, as an acting driver, Aikens had a narrow escape from injury, if not death, when his train was derailed while crossing a bridge outside Cloncurry.[18] It was only the railwayman's *esprit de corps* as a unionist which long kept his morale high, as when "Enjo" and "Pooger" resorted to "Shanghai feeding" in defiance of the Railways Department's ban on stopping the shunt for a meal. (This "Pooger" was the self same "Pooge" of the anonymous ballad:

> Lest we forget the "Roarer",
> The famous "Pooge" O'Brien,
> He's very fond of going crook,
> But fonder of the wine.[19])

The shunter's crib, containing his tea cut up in small pieces, was handed to the fireman at the beginning of the shift and at tea-time the feeding began. The fireman threw a small piece of food to the shunter every time he came within throwing distance of the engine on a shunt, and "the dexterity of some of the shunters in catching the morsels in their mouths before

they reach the ground, evokes rounds of applause from the residents . . . who nightly line the fences in order to enjoy the free entertainment."[20]

Increasing unrest in industry was exemplified by a railway strike in 1925 during the brief interregnum of Theodore's successor, Gillies. Railwaymen demanded that the government restore the basic wage to its 1921 level and legislate for a forty-four-hour week. The strike dragged on from August into September; eventually the government backed down, at least to the extent of agreeing to wage increases.[21] However, the terms of the strike settlement did not include the claims of the central and northern divisions of the railway service, in particular for a forty-four-hour week, and they were only cajoled into returning to work "with the utmost difficulty" and after repeated prodding by the central strike committee in Brisbane.[22]

Although himself a radical on the far left-wing of the labour movement, Tom Aikens was always circumspect in his relations with communists. It was not that he objected violently to any aspect of Marxist ideology. He did not even disavow the foreign derivation which many of his comrades dismissed as irrelevant to the Australian experience. But he did take exception to communists as ultra-militant, sour-gut types who were never satisfied. "Of course you see them everywhere in every age," he eventually decided, "always fighting for the rights of others. In fact I sometimes think that if you suddenly gave them their rights they'd start grumbling about having lost their wrongs."[23] On the occasion of the 1925 strike, however, Tom agreed with the communist press that the northerners had a good case which they would have won if AWU officials on the local strike committees had not played their "usual role of false advisers and strike breakers".[24] Northerners were left "smarting under a sense of betrayal and injustice"; they were thereafter even more disposed towards taking direct action if they felt the necessity for it, independently of their executive in the south.[25]

The showdown was not long in coming. In 1926, under Gillies' successor, McCormack, Cabinet and its supporters struck at the influence of the ARU by manipulating its exclusion from both the QCE of the ALP and the Labor-in-Politics convention.[26] In the following year, yet another railway strike originating in north Queensland prompted the government's dismissal or lockout of the entire state railways' staff.[27] Wailed one incredulous working-class newspaper in banner headlines, "Has Cabinet Gone Mad?"

There are grounds for believing that the ALP government's

determination to extirpate union radicalism was motivated less by any genuine misgivings about "communist" disruption than by a much more specific concern with retaining the support of the majority right-wing unions. There was, after all, no more effective or enduring means than this of preventing the ARU from realizing its goal of "One Big Union" capable of presenting a solid and united front to, and possibly against, government.[28] Certainly McCormack had carried out with dramatic effect his threat to fight the unions.[29] Conservatives everywhere rejoiced: "Mr. McCormack is worthy of the highest public regard [and] for the purpose of this fight [the 1927 lockout] Mr. McCormack is our commander-in-chief."[30] For their part, the militant unions totally rejected McCormack's view that a Labor government should govern in the interests of the whole community, and now found themselves quite estranged from the ALP. Tim Moroney agonizedly voiced that disquiet: "Must the workers suffer also in the interests of the community? All power to labour!"[31]

The "sufferings" of the workers did not end with low salaries and abominable working conditions. Home life was at best dreary, at worst troglodytic, which was why the man of the house grogged on or endlessly kicked around a football at weekends. At least in Europe, whence his forbears had emigrated, the rural labourer's poverty and drudgery were softened by the physical help and moral sustenance of family who either lived with him or nearby; even in industrial slums there were diversions and entertainments which offered some relief from the oppressive loneliness and domestic squalor of urban life. Not so in outback Australia, however, in a place like Cloncurry, which, apart from being just about the hottest town on earth, was practically devoid of any civilized amenity. The Aikens' house on the outskirts of town, where Tom immured his sanguine bride, was of corrugated iron on an angle-iron frame. Inside, most materials and fixtures were such as could not be destroyed by termites. The windows were sheet-iron shutters for several years until Tom accumulated sufficient savings to glaze them. In a futile gesture to coolness and ventilation the walls stopped short of meeting the sprawling roof by a foot or two, leaving a wide space gauzed with chicken wire between the iron itself and the ceiling of paper-bark. The gauze may have admitted some air—it was a little difficult to say in summer temperatures that frequently ran for weeks above 38°c—but it proved much more efficient as an entrance for snakes, hornets, elephant beetles and flying ants. The floor was of ant-bed, the stuff of the termites' or white ants' nests, which made a serviceable cement when crushed, wetted and beaten

hard. Mrs Aikens was responsible for most of the interior furnishings, though Tom, a passable handyman, had improved on some. He had fashioned several dressing tables and kitchen cabinets from the kerosene tins and square-faced butter boxes which grocers gave away for nothing to their regular clientele. His wife, a capable seamstress, had stitched and dyed a number of sugar bags into colourful mats which adorned the floor in regular, fussy pattern. Toilet facilities were outside and consisted of a hole in the ground surmounted by a crude wooden seat, all encased by a wooden shelter bearing some resemblance to a sentry box. The only fresh water was from a horse trough in the street or a corrugated-iron tank which collected rare and precious rain water from the roof of the house. Bathing was an irregular event because of the scarcity of water throughout most of the year, and it was undertaken gingerly and sparingly in a rain tub under the tank's only tap; it was a wild, sensuous indulgence to splash extravagantly, perhaps once a year, when the tank overflowed during the "Wet". Indoor lighting came from a couple of "hurricane" lamps which were very economical in their consumption of kerosene. Refrigeration was a tin safe swathed in damp sugar bags; a more elaborate "ice chest", with a compartment of heavy zinc cladding that provided adequate insulation for chunks of broken ice above a second food compartment, was an expensive luxury for most working men.

In these cheerless surroundings Margaret Aikens slaved from before dawn often till midnight. On wash days she had to soak their clothes in a round galvanized tub filled with soapy water, and then scrub the whole wash on a washing board. This stood on two wooden legs and had a crinkly surface like ripples in wet sand, and she had to rub the clothes vigorously backwards and forwards until they were clean. The clothes were then dropped into a couple of kerosene tins and boiled over an open fire. Later, they were taken out with the end of a broom handle, or a pot stick, and rinsed in another tub full of clean water before being pegged on a clothes line. The line stretched across the backyard between two poles, or from a tree to the corner of a shed, or the fowl house (depending on the time of the year, to catch the angle of the sun) and was held up by a couple of "props". Quite often, when the washing was flapping around in a stiff breeze, one of these would snap and the washing fall in the dirt; there was nothing she could do about it but pick it up and start all over again. When the washing was dry she took it inside and pressed each article with a flat iron that had been getting hot on the wood stove. But first the hot plate on

the stove had to be rubbed in a tray of fine sand and wiped with a kerosene rag to remove any grease or dirt that had gathered on it. It was not until she left Cloncurry and went to live in Townsville that Margaret got her Pott's iron, then a self-heating petrol variety, which finally made her ironing a much less time-consuming, painstaking and laborious chore. Even then, Tom always complained that his Saturday-night shirt, which had been dipped in starch before ironing, felt like a piece of cardboard round his neck and almost choked him.

When she was not washing clothes, Margaret Aikens filled the rest of her day with cleaning the house, tending the chooks, milking the goats, walking to town and doing the shopping, sewing all her own clothes and mending Tom's, gathering and chopping wood for the stove, baking cakes and cooking Tom's meals when he was home. Of course there was baby Mavis, too, who came along in their first year of marriage, but at least the work and worry of that event were counterbalanced by some qualified joy: there were occasions now to clear the corrosion from her vocal chords if not the cobwebs from her mind.

But of all the interminable tasks which Margaret Aikens faced, none was quite so loathsome as the agony of cooking. Their "Crown" wood stove fitted into a gloomy, corrugated-iron recess just off the kitchen from which protruded a narrow chimney. Several times each week she had to tap this with a piece of wood in order to free the accumulated soot, and invariably a fine black powdery cloud of dust billowed back into the kitchen. The stove was made of cast-iron, mounted on four curved legs. There were six plates on top which could be lifted off with a small lever, and underneath were the fire box and an oven. Beside the stove on a piece of flat iron there were always stacks of split and slippery wood for fuel and at least one small heap of chips to start the fire with. But since the Aikens' could not afford to buy firewood, it was Margaret's job to go out of the town dragging a wheelbarrow to fill with dead branches and logs. Back home, she dumped these on a wood-heap in the back yard. Next, they had to be chopped into fire-wood. She lifted the big ones on to a wooden horse and cut them into blocks with a cross-cut saw. They were then split with an axe and taken inside the house. The notchy ones Margaret always left until last, thinking that some Good Samaritan like Tom might come along and cut them, but that rarely happened. After the fire was lit it had to be perpetually watched in case it went out, and only then could the cooking begin. There were only a few mild compensations for the punishing attention which the iron

monster required: on cold winter nights Margaret would sneak a few minutes to sit next to the stove and watch the flames dance among the glowing coals, sometimes poking in a potato to bake it, or toasting a piece of cheese on the end of a fork. Even if she had finished all her work, there was not much point looking for warmth in the marriage bed, for Tom would be out working a train, grogging on down at the pub, haranguing a union or party meeting, playing football or, when he was at home, reading a book by the light of a hurricane lamp in the bed he had set up on the verandah.

Margaret Aikens' only deliverance from her gruelling routine was an occasional visit to the pictures on Saturday nights. Saturday night was always the big night, and almost everyone in town stepped out, neatly dressed, to spend the entire evening at the pictures. It cost sixpence to go in, and that was not too expensive for a full and often lively night's entertainment. Every word spoken in the picture was printed in large letters at the bottom of the screen, but that did not deter someone in the audience from reading aloud the entire dialogue. If the narrator were too much under the weather he would be silenced by a barrage of jeers and lolly-wrappers, but most times the audience good-humouredly put up with him. An accomplished pianist played appropriate music during the screening, and if the projection equipment ever broke down, as it frequently did, she would lead a spontaneous sing-song in which everyone revelled. Since Tom was never comfortable sitting quietly and anonymously in an audience, looking and listening to someone else, the sing-song was always the part he enjoyed most, notwithstanding his starched and constricting collar. During interval a lad came around selling peanuts, lollies and chocolates which he carried on a wooden tray, and often there would be a dog fight which the ushers and owners tried to break up to the accompaniment of the audience's enthusiastic urging and advice. The alternate encouragement and deprecation would then continue through the main feature, which always took up the second half of the programme, when few were so blasé as not to be caught up, at least a little, in the excitement on the screen.

The defeat of the McCormack Labor government in 1929 was an occasion for restrained celebration on the part of many workers like Tom Aikens. "Our first reaction was, well, it's a terrible thing to happen to the Labor Party, but they damn well deserved all they got because of the raw deal they'd been giving the workers. Still, we all silently hoped and prayed that, when they got back into power again, they would have learned their

lesson."[32] And, indeed, the fall of Labor was in many respects the salvation of the ALP, for under the conservative Moore ministry the workers knew nothing but "tragedy and despair",[33] compared with which the "betrayals" of Theodore and McCormack seemed positively benevolent.

Nevertheless, despite convincing evidence of large-scale desertions from the ALP in the election that toppled the McCormack government,[34] there was subsequently no attempt to mollify leftist opinion in the party when it returned to power in 1932. The new Premier, Willian Forgan Smith, placed his wager on the moderate majority in the labour movement and forged a close alliance with the new State President of the AWU, Clarrie Fallon, who later became Secretary of the AWU, state and federal President of the AWU, and state and federal President of the ALP. Fallon and Forgan Smith were never friends, but their relationship was always cordial. Each realized that he needed the other. Upon this understanding was built the edifice of political power in Queensland for the next decade.[35]

Forgan Smith's overriding concerns during his first term of office were to consolidate the statutory gains made by Labor during the period 1915–29, many of which had been expunged by the Moore government, and to confront the problems of economic depression. He vigorously reasserted the view that Labor should attempt to govern in the interests of the whole community and, on the basis of this policy, was decisively returned to power in 1935. Loyally supported on almost every major issue by Fallon and the AWU, the Premier's control over the party's policy-making apparatus was little short of absolute. Under Forgan Smith, the ALP frankly settled down to a policy of liberal administration of the capitalist system.[36]

However, this brand of parliamentary, multi-class, reformist revisionism remained anathema to the labour movement's left-wing, whose chief spokesman remained Tim Moroney in the pages of *The Advocate*. "Under [Forgan Smith's] regime, the *class* position of the workers in this State did not improve relatively to the position of the employing class; no fundamental principle of working-class policy was established during his term as Premier. . . . Under Mr. Smith's leadership the Labor Party lost its working class identity."[37] Others—the more pragmatic, perhaps—were just as disturbed by the autocratic hold of the QCE–AWU "interlocking directorate" over the party's entire decision-making processes.

The upshot was that fissiparous tendencies became strong and a spate of defections from the party took place in the late 1930s

and early 1940s, to the Communist Party,[38] to a Protestant Labor Party,[39] to so-called Andrew Fisher, King O'Malley and Hermit Park labour candidates. Each was concerned, in one way or another, with restoring pristine labour traditions which they sincerely believed the ALP had sullied.

It is the Hermit Park renegade movement which Tom Aikens led that the rest of our story mostly concerns. It is a fascinating and, above all, very human story of "careerists, turncoats, hypocrites, outright scoundrels, stuffy functionaries devoid of sense and imagination, bellowing enemies of critical intelligence, irritatingly self-righteous clowns bent on enforcing suburban points of view, pussyfooters, demagogues, stooges for hostile outside groups and interests, aged and decaying hacks and ordinary blatherskites".[40] In a word, it is a story of what politics is in large part about.

4

Puftaloons and Rosella Jam

Aikens remembers his early years in Townsville as "very pleasant" ones. The brash young man from the bush was only too eager to display his talents in a much wider arena. He joined the Apollo Club, a male choir of some considerable, and not merely local, repute, but found to his chagrin that a good voice did not necessarily make a good singer. According to his teacher, not only was his ignorance of music "abysmal", but many of the "natural" habits he had developed, mainly in the pubs of Cloncurry, were musically execrable and would just have to be unlearned. Tom's self-esteem was shaken, but it was large enough to survive far deadlier blows than that. Besides, it was hard to believe you were really *that* bad when the new radio station, 4TO, invited you to sing a daunting ballad like "When the Ebb Tide Flows" on the occasion of its official opening. Moreover, was not singing really an enjoyable hobby, a means of bringing pleasure to other people but mainly to yourself? Let others knuckle down to the discipline and fastidiousness of eisteddfod singing.

So, like many other men with exceptional natural talents, Aikens was tempted to be lazy. He saw little point in continuing to hone his cutting edges when these were already sharper than those of most others. So far life had not been all that exigent, and there was really no good reason to doubt the wisdom of a piece of advice he had been given years before. While working a train to Nonda, his driver, Eddie Carlsen, had proffered a well-meaning tip: "I tell you what, mate; if you ever want to know anything, just go and ask some smart bugger and he will fall over himself to tell you."[1] It was advice that Aikens took to heart.

Tom had a lot of fun in the choir. It suited him fine to be on a stage with people looking at him, and even as one of fifty faces it was impossible for anyone in the audience not to notice

the massive frame, the beaming, cherubic grin and the bellowing baritone that just would not submit to choral discipline. It was a way of getting around, too. The Apollo choir had admirers all over the north and its occasional concerts in neighbouring towns were invariably packed out. Just before Christmas in 1931 no fewer than one hundred and twenty Townsville performers belonging to the Apollo choir and orchestra, as well as the Railway band, travelled by rail-motor down to the little Burdekin delta sugar town of Ayr, and the choir was "forced to capitulate" to the "warm approbation" of the audience by "rendering numerous encores". Later, half the town crowded into the Masonic Hall to fête the singers at a sumptuous supper prepared by the Methodist Ladies' Guild.[2]

Aikens' arrival in Townsville coincided with the onset of the depression, yet this did little to alter the "pleasantness" of a full life. To be sure, Aikens was not alone in continuing to lead a sunny life; there can have been few urban centres in the whole of the Western world where the effects of industrial depression were so mild and transitory as in the towns and cities of tropical Australia. In a land where the workers' homes sat on spacious allotments, most with their own vegetable gardens, fruit trees and chook yards; in a climate where the severest of winters called for no more protective covering than a couple of blankets on perhaps a dozen nights of the year, the depression for most people meant inconvenience but rarely hardship. To be sure, there was unemployment; but that condition, which in other places deprived workers of the necessities of life, in Townsville hardly even curtailed life's amenities. An unemployed worker might spend his days trolling the coasts or netting the creeks for a relaxed and easy catch in waters prolific with fish. A day of unemployment was more like a day off work than a day out of work. When the fishermen came home with their loads of "doggies", or mackerel, mud crabs and prawns, they kept what their families needed and hawked the rest around the suburbs. It was a common sight to see a man traipsing the streets, dragging a laden go-cart behind him and yodelling "fish-o, alive-o". Since there was no refrigeration, he covered the fish with pieces of ice (his only overhead, for even the bait he caught in the tidal flats with a yabby pump), or sometimes with just a damp sugar bag, to keep the fish fresh as long as possible. Even at threepence per pound, many people did not have the ready cash to buy the fish (if they had not already caught their own), and many a catch went unsold. Rather than let the fish spoil, however, the fisherman gave away what he could not sell.

There was not only fishing and gardening but hunting. The countryside around Townsville was teeming with wild fowl, ducks, pigs and goats. There were even hundreds of wild goats inhabiting a knoll near the harbour, little more than a stone's throw away from the main street, and they were regarded as fair game for anyone whose swiftness of foot and dexterity of limb were a match for his elusive quarry. The goats provided good fresh meat which connoisseurs thought tastier than lamb; or, if taken home to graze in back yards, they gave a plentiful supply of milk and rich, creamy butter. At least they brought a welcome change from fish and fowl. As well, there was rosella jam from the bush near the front stairs, which, in the opinion of most people, outshone by far all commercial tinned varieties; there were lettuce, kohlrabi and radishes from the front garden (and even pig-weed from the lawn, which some swore hashed up into a superior bubble-and-squeak); there were pawpaws, bananas and mangoes from the back-yard trees. When Tom Aikens later told parliament of the superabundance of fruit in Townsville, he was guilty of only slight exaggeration: " . . . today millions, not thousands, but millions of mangoes are falling from the trees in the north and rotting on the ground. In Townsville city alone the rotten mango problem is a health problem that we have to grapple with every year. People are virtually walking knee-deep in them on the streets and footpaths in Townsville alone today. Millions of mangoes are rotting on the footpaths and in the gutters."[3] The characteristic of hyperbole in Tom's rhetoric mostly delighted his audiences; sometimes, however, it could be mischievous as well as merely picturesque, making it also a source of irritation and anger.

For those too lazy or lacking in resourcefulness to feast on bounteous nature's fare, there were still manifold ways of keeping hunger well and truly at bay. Bread and dripping, for instance, was part of nearly everyone's daily diet—oozing, glutinous rivers of recycled dripping spread on thick, dry slices of bread or toast and sprinkled with salt and pepper. It was made from rendering down pieces of beef fat which the butcher gave away as unsaleable, then used over and over again for frying and roasting, poured back into empty jam tins, never thrown away. According to its most ardent votaries, the dripping became more delectable with each recycling. It was very common, too, for people to buy a sixpence worth of scraps which were little bits of left-over trimmings stacked by the butcher on the side of his enormous wooden chopping block or scooped up from where they had fallen on the sawdust-covered floor. For

dessert there was usually "cocky's joy", the dark, cloying, inexpensive molasses which drained out of the sugar-refining moulds; in a land of sugar, the dark-green treacle tin was as familiar as salt, pepper and Worcestershire sauce on most dining-room tables. It was spread by the tablespoon on dry bread; used as a sweetener in cakes and puddings; sometimes poured into cups of tea in place of sugar. On special occasions there were puftaloons and treacle. The puftaloon was a concoction of flour, water and baking powder, mixed into a soft dough and dropped by the spoonful into a pot of boiling dripping. (The dripping was preferably, but not invariably, virgin, which meant that it was as yet untainted by the pungent odours of well-matured beef.) When the globule of dough expanded and took on a fluffy texture and golden brown hue, it was regarded as cooked and ready to be eaten. Broken open with the fingers (but never cut with a knife), the puftaloon was ritually smothered with "cocky's joy" then savoured to the accompaniment of muted but respectful swoonings, lip-smackings and finger-lickings. It was never easier to banish sombre thoughts of depression, unemployment and hard times than at a puftaloon party.

Of far greater importance than the depression in the political education of Tom Aikens was a 1931 industrial disturbance in the Railways Department, which engendered extreme rancour, cost Aikens his job, confirmed him in his socialist conviction of untrammelled man's "monstrous inhumanity", and precipitated his decision to re-enter politics as a custodian of the interests of the "little man". The trouble arose, as some of the most savage of human conflicts do, over the most trivial of incidents. A quantity of copper ore was produced by non-union labour at Dobbyn, near Cloncurry, and some assiduous unionist had scrawled in chalk the legend, "Black Ore from Dobbyn", on the side of one of the railway wagons carrying the ore to Townsville. Whether by calculated intention, bored inattention, or simply by night, the wagon somehow escaped notice until it reached Townsville's South Yard, the goods marshalling depot some 960 km away. There it was detected, and three railwaymen—O'Brien, Sparrow and Wood—were peremptorily dismissed for refusing to handle the "black" wagon. On 19 November a mass meeting of railwaymen in the old Olympia open-air cinema in Sturt Street decided to declare a strike from midnight on 27 November unless the three men were meanwhile reinstated in their jobs.[4] On 26 November the non-Labor government of the day, led by Arthur Moore, over-reacted to the railwaymen's ultimatum by rushing through parliament a *Railway Strike and*

Townsville Railway Station, headquarters of the "Great Northern" Division of the Queensland Government Railways. Photo by courtesy of the *Townsville Daily Bulletin*.

Public Safety Preservation Bill, empowering the Governor of Queensland to proclaim a state of emergency in the interests of maintaining railway service.[5] Not only that, but a force of special police was despatched to Townsville to reinforce the persuasions of parliament. For several days, bands of uniformed men patrolled the main streets of Townsville, crowding and jostling knots of sullen and resentful men. Occasionally, there were ugly scenes. "Some of the police thugs would walk behind us as we walked along the footpaths, and they would kick us viciously in the leg muscle; if you turned on them, as some of the fellows did, they'd arrest you for creating a disturbance or assaulting a policeman."[6]

Police intimidation nonetheless had its intended effect, and the strike collapsed. Not content with mere victory, however, a vindictive Tory government determined to punish the refractory railwaymen and promulgated a "black list" of renegades. In the long run it was an honour to be blacklisted by a non-Labor government, and in fact one man whose name appeared on the list later rose to the position of Acting Commissioner of the Queensland Government Railways, but there were scant grounds for exultation at the time: "men were refused re-employment—no-one knew why—excellent men, good citizens, good workers."[7]

The victimization of Jimmy Morrill was an example of the government's seemingly insensate desire for revenge, leaving a legacy of "bitterness and wounds that took years and years to heal".[8] Morrill was in charge of the gravity coal-stage at the Railways' engine sheds (the "running shed", as it was called) which he ran alone and regarded as his pride and joy. A man of tremendous strength, he had devised an ingenious system of wooden levers to open the doors of the coal hoppers on the stage, letting the coal fall first into the bins then into the locomotive tenders underneath. Without assistance, he would then close the doors and slip the pins after the cascade of falling coal. But Jimmy was also a militant unionist and suddenly found himself anathematized on the "black list" as an "indifferent worker". For about six months, until he was eventually reinstated in his job after the fall of the Moore government, the wryest joke on the Railways was about the two, often three, men who had to be employed to do the same work Jimmy Morrill had done by himself.[9]

Aikens, prominent in union activities since his arrival in Townsville, was another involuntary casualty of the 1931 strike. To earn a crust, he now made his one and only incursion into

the murky realm of private enterprise, as an originating partner in the firm of Davies and Aikens, Upholsterers and Mattress Makers. At the time, selling warm and downy upholstered furniture to north Queenslanders seemed about as promising a business as selling refrigerators to Eskimos. Yet for a time the firm flourished, largely because of Aikens' ebullient energy in promoting its products. Mounted on his pushbike—the same venerable contraption which, like Churchill's cigar, later became his personal political trademark—he pedalled all over the town, knocking on every door, cheerfully soliciting orders and, incidentally, making himself known. It took some time for the realization to dawn on him that the only orders the firm appeared to be getting were those drummed up by himself. Davies, as crafty a carpetbagger as any of the droves of southerners who each winter descended upon the north with vainglorious ideas of fleecing the local bumpkins and living a comfortable beachcombing idyll in the tropics, was appropriating all the unsolicited orders which came direct into the shop and then filling them privately and profitably on other premises.[10]

Shortly after the return of the Forgan Smith Labor government in June 1932, Aikens cut his capitalistic losses and rejoined the Railways. He did so reluctantly because of the depressed morale of railwaymen and the hatreds still smouldering after the 1931 strike. Members of the AFULE (Australian Federated Union of Locomotive Enginemen), who had chosen not to participate in the strike, were being sent to Coventry by their erstwhile ARU comrades: two men might work an engine for days without exchanging so much as a single pleasantry. To Aikens, the 1931 strike was thus a "tragedy" which laid the foundations of his future political life.[11] His name soon appeared on the register of the Hermit Park branch of the ALP at its founding in 1932 specifically to fight bureaucratic victimization and injustice; at the end of the year he sought his party's preselection, although prematurely on this occasion, as an aldermanic candidate for the 1933 Townsville municipal election.

5

Townsville Utopia

Townsville, like a thousand other communites in Australia, proudly lays claim to a number of historical distinctions. There is the first official hoisting of the Australian flag, for instance; more preciously, perhaps, there is the staging of the only bullfight ever held on Australian soil. Interest in the latter spectacle was so great that Cinesound News Review sent a unit from Sydney to film it (17 May 1933). It is also recorded that one bull delivered a "glancing blow" to the lower abdomen of the matador, a Spaniard named Vucataro, though the other two bulls proved so "lethargic" that stockmen were reduced to chasing them with stock-whips.[1]

Townsville's working-class citizens were also steeped in the traditions of unionism and the labour movement. For more than a generation the back room of an unprepossessing building in Flinders Street, known as Foley's boot store, was the university of Labor politicians in the north, some of whom, like Theodore and McCormack, rose to the highest positions in federal and state politics. In the years between 1933 and his election to municipal office in 1936, Aikens worked hard at enhancing his standing as a credible successor to the immortals of his adopted city. These were stirring, hope-filled years for the labour movement, before the trauma of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, when at meetings of the Hermit Park ALP, "you had to be early to get a seat".[2] In north Queensland, depression that was a good deal less than "great" stimulated rather than dulled an almost euphoric sense of idealism and expectation, and ALP members still hailed one another breathlessly as "Comrade!"[3]

In this slightly apocalyptic ambiance, Aikens cast himself in the role of party intellectual and sage, which he played convincingly because of his background of wide reading and private study. Whenever the Hermit Park branch paused to consider an issue of supra-local or theoretical importance,

transcending the bread-and-butter concerns which mostly preoccupied its unionist members, Aikens was invariably the proponent. He might offer himself as an expert on statutory law or as an authority on the theory and practice of local government.[4] Of course there were two dangers inherent in his position: first, his mates were generally suspicious of ambition and the desire to raise oneself above one's station; education was often seen as a form of snobbery and a way of social advancement that broke up the camaraderie of working men.[5] In the second place, intellectual independence, for all the guarded admiration it commanded among the rank and file, was potentially incompatible with discipline in a party whose principal strength lay in the subordination of individual to class interests. The revolutionaries, heretics and schismatics in history were never the realists and practical men who were ready to compromise, to accept the degree of change that it was possible to achieve; they were, like Aikens, the idealists and men of principle who remained steadfast in their convictions and messianic in their zeal. Indeed there were early indications of what ALP notables later discovered to be the abrasive and obdurate individuality of Tom Aikens: at the end of 1935 Aikens instigated a strong branch protest to the QCE over the non-endorsement of "Comrade" Bolger for the municipal plebiscite.[6]

In 1936, Labor aldermen had never before formed a majority on the Townsville City Council, but in the municipal elections held in April, the first in which Aikens participated as a candidate, they came within easy striking distance of that goal. Aikens the campaigner successfully put to the test a hypothesis he always subsequently followed as a fundamental law of electoral survival: issues are what the people are actually thinking about, not what they are told they ought to be thinking about.

The main issue in 1936, indeed the perennial issue in Townsville local politics, was lack of water. 1935 had been the driest year in living memory, and water restrictions were draconian in their severity. There was a total ban on the watering of plants, even with bath water. If the back-yard horticulturalist wanted to preserve a precious orchid, he had to take it inside his home and hide it like some common thief secreting his loot. Aikens, at his street-corner meetings, talked about nothing but water. Using the forthright and vivid language for which he was becoming noted, he stigmatized Ross River, the city's main watercourse and the source of its water supply as "a dirty, evil, foul-smelling swamp";[7] the people, in their overriding concern

for water, cheerfully forgot that it was *their* river Tom was disparaging. On the other hand, the non-Labor "Ratepayers' Team" ignored the water crisis and found its main issue in the dispute between the respective supporters of Day Labour and Contract Labour as the most efficient means of constructing Townsville's long-awaited sewerage mains. "Some of the local [ALP] advocates of Day Labour have had their own buildings and houses built by contract, because it was advantageous, but they want to burden the electors with Day Labour. Why? If it is sound business for their own affairs, why not for you?"[8] Aikens' riposte, that the point of the Ratepayers' argument escaped him when there was in any case no water to flush the toilets, called forth the usual ribald and appreciative guffaws from his audiences.

The Ratepayers' Team was returned with five aldermen, compared to the ALP's four.[9] The conservatism of working-class voters, which on issues of financial control and management still ensured the electoral ascendancy of a businessman's government, for the time being prevailed. As the *Bulletin* pompously put it, if a Labor City Council were returned, "the splendid fiduciary position" of the Council would be "speedily destroyed".[10] Yet the creditable overall performance of the four successful ALP aldermen (Aikens, Illich, Corcoran, Hamilton), provided scant justification for another post-electoral prognostication that the ALP would "never" gain control of the municipality of Townsville "so long as the [Ratepayer] aldermen conduct their business with the same judgment, moderation and fairness as they have done in the past."[11]

Aikens was back in his element, never again to leave it. His first positions of public responsibility on the Council were membership of the Health and General Purposes Committee and the Parks and Reserves Committee.[12] Over the next three years he learned two more important lessons: first, that the downfall of a successful politician is most rapid on the slippery-slide of corruption; "it's not just that you have to be honest," said Tom, "it's that you have to be seen to be honest." Second, he learned that the successful politican is always the one who unwaveringly serves the interests of the people who elect him.

In August 1937 Aikens' daughter, Mavis, was appointed to a position of typist in the City Accountant's Department ahead of ninety-nine other applicants for the job. Although Aikens himself was not a member of the Committee making the appointment, one of the Ratepayer aldermen, Frank North, smelled venality on the part of those making the appointment.

His implication was that Aikens, behind the scenes, had behaved like a nepotist: "I feel that Alderman Aikens is able to do a great deal to restore the Council to its former position in the minds of the people, and I hope that if he feels that there has been the slightest injustice done to any of the other applicants by the special treatment meted out to his daughter, that he will take such steps as will make it easy for the Council to do justice."[13]

Aikens took the suprisingly weak line that, if his daughter was to be penalized, "others who had been appointed in a similar manner ought also to be penalized".[14] His case was not strengthened by remarks he had himself made in connection with a previous appointment, which North now gleefully hurled back at him: "There was no greater stink in the nostrils of the public than appointments made behind closed doors."[15] But apparently time-honoured custom had conferred respectability on the practice, at least among aldermen, and North's protestations in the Council fell on deaf ears. The trouble was, however, that he would not shut up publicly, and an "angry debate" in the press dragged on for a month. Amid accusations of "cowardice", "personal hatred", "contemptible hypocrisy", Aikens thus learned by bitter experience the force of a maxim which he later preached darkly against others: "Give me a grain of truth and on it I will build an edifice of assumption,"[16] which was Tom's self-consciously sapient and ponderously self-educated way of saying, "Where there's smoke there's fire", or, as the recipients of his verbal lashings often complained, standing the dialectic on its head, "When mud is slung some of it always sticks".

No mud stuck to Aikens, partly because his people, like Australians anywhere else, tolerated, indeed expected, a modicum of corruption in their politicans as long as it was neither too blatant, too avaricious, nor too self-seeking; but more importantly because, having had his scare and learned his lesson, Aikens never again made the same mistake, the mistake of allowing his private interests to impinge upon his public responsibilities. Indeed, the converse of the lesson also was not lost on him: if the fastest route to political oblivion lay in the sacrifice of public to private interest, surely the best guarantee against failure in politics consisted in the undeviating espousal and tireless advocacy of that very public interest? Momentarily, however, Aikens hesitated before giving an affirmative answer to that question. He was first tempted along yet another path of corruption, this time at the beckoning of others.

Political opponents, recognizing an uncommon eloquence

which they would fain have had supporting rather than assailing them, dangled before Tom Aikens the enticements of social status and prestige. Said Tom, "I can remember walking down Flinders Street and having some of the top-ranking business and professional men come up to me and tell me that my talents were being wasted and that if I listened to them and took their advice I would have a bright future, that I could even hope to become a member of the North Queensland Club."[17] But he was not to be seduced; he decided that there was even less future in following the advice of his new-found admirers when such as they would be unlikely to vote for him even though he were the only fellow in the ballot. Instead, he reached the decision not merely that he would remain a representative of the "ordinary, useful people", but that his entire political behaviour would conform to a single principle: the advancement of the interests of his electors, the little people. "Right through the troubled war years, which eventually put me into parliament," Tom reflected, "we just went on in our own plain, straightforward, steady way, ignoring everything that we thought was not in the interests of the people."[18]

Once having taken his political bearings, Aikens set out to chart his course in detail. Most lunch-times, the four Labor aldermen would meet behind the Locomotive Foreman's Office; there, huddled earnestly around their tucker boxes, they held the Caucus meetings that decided Townsville's municipal destinies over the next decade. They examined old ideas and tossed around new ones, accepting them if it seemed that they would "please" the people and rejecting them if it seemed they would not. What gradually emerged was a determination not only to proceed with the public acquisition of Townsville's principal public utilities, but also to initiate municipal competiton in a great many lesser fields traditionally reserved to private enterprise; in short, to inaugurate a bold, thoroughgoing and, in many respects, novel programme of municipal socialization.[19]

Indeed the "main issue"[20] in the 1939 local election became the Labor proposal to set up a Council retail undertaking for the cheaper sale of major electrical appliances, a scheme first mooted by Aikens and taken up enthusiastically by his comrades in the Hermit Park ALP.[21] In July 1937, when Aikens had first tried to persuade the Council to implement his prosposal, his motion was lost only on the casting vote of the Mayor.[22] At a time when hire purchase was still regarded as usurious, rather than as the panacea for working-class impecuniosity that it later became, Aikens loudly deplored the "money lending" practices

which placed the ownership of an electric stove in particular beyond the financial reach of most workers. "The local retailers of stoves bought them at a certain price, placed their profit on top of that price, and . . . if time payment was desired, ten per cent was imposed on the selling price."[23] A people's electrical undertaking would not only sell stoves more cheaply but also extend time-payment periods and halve the interest rate on borrowed money.[24]

Despite dire warnings in certain quarters that a Labor Council would be subject to "the dictation of distant outside politicans who [would] seek to use the electors of the municipality for their own ends",[25] the voters of Townsville were sufficiently impressed with Labor's proposals. In fact, the election produced two notable results: for the first time a socialist Council gained control of Townsville's municipal affairs, and for the first time in Australia a communist, F.W. Paterson, was returned at the polls.

Paterson was born in Gladstone in 1897 and attended primary school there. He received his secondary education at the Rockhampton Grammar School and the Brisbane Grammar School, winning a State Open Scholarhsip to the University of Queensland, but interrupted his undergraduate studies to enlist in the Australian Imperial Force for military service overseas. He spent the last few months of World War I in England and France. Back at the University of Queensland after the war, a fine academic record led eventually to a B.A. degree and a Rhodes Scholarship, providing him with a second overseas stint during which he read Theology at Oxford. At length he returned to Australia in 1923, studied for the Bar, and finally entered private legal practice in Townsville in 1933. A certain ideological affinity between Paterson and Aikens soon made them boon companions, the more so since each possessed qualities the other lacked but wished he had: Paterson, a formal, disciplined education and cosmopolitan outlook; Aikens, a self-made, oratorical brilliance and parish-pump charisma. While an alderman of the Townsville City Council, Paterson was an "Independent Socialist" candidate for the Townsville-based federal seat of Herbert in the 1940 national election (when the Communist Party was banned), and eventually entered the Queensland state parliament in 1944 as communist member for Bowen, whereupon he resigned from the Townsville City Council. In 1947 he was re-elected to the Queensland Legislative Assembly for the second and last time.[26]

Fred Paterson held the balance of power in a Council

composed of four Ratepayer aldermen, five ALP aldermen, and the nominally Independent Mayor, J.S. Gill, who was in reality, however, an ardent anti-socialist. Gill was originally Clerk of the Thuringowa Shire, which surrounds Townsville, for twenty-three years before being elected to the Townsville City Council in 1927. He was then re-elected alderman in 1930, but resigned in December 1932 because of a new statutory requirement precluding salaried Local Authority officers from simultaneously holding elected aldermanic posts. Shortly afterwards he resigned from the chief administrative post of the Thuringowa Shire in order to contest the Townsville mayoralty in the 1933 municipal election. Already an elderly man in 1933 (he was born in 1867), Gill remained Mayor of Townsville until 1952. He built up a reputation as "a fine English gentleman" who comported himself "in the grand manner of a gentleman of the old school";[27] in 1939 the *Bulletin* thought that, "like Roosevelt", Gill was decidedly entiled to a third term.[28] Closer, and perhaps less generous associates, however, thought that it was not so much statesmanlike qualities that had kept him in office for so long as the fact that "he agreed with everyone".[29]

The five successful ALP aldermen were Aikens, Corcoran, Hamilton, Illich and Kogler. Aikens' contemporaries then saw him as "a force to be reckoned with . . . a dynamic personality, a keen, intelligent and lucid debater, with a great command of the English language, and wonderful tenacity".[30] Jim Corcoran was a "a dour, sound, reliant fighter for the workers"; Vic Hamilton "made the anti-Laborites realize that Labor can produce men equal to those from any other section of the community" (a rather backhanded compliment, since most of his friends and acquaintances privately referred to him as "suave"); Andy Illich was "solid, unswerving . . . an old Labor stalwart . . . and one of the best Unionists in the Railway Service"; Bill Kogler had "a quiet, sincere manner, sound judgment . . . and was a keen student of the Working Class Movement".

Since Paterson had publicly announced at the hustings his endorsement of ALP municipal policy, effective socialist control of the Council was thereby assured.[31] A little apprehensively, the *Register* suggested that it was not so much the positive appeal of Labor policy that had brought about these "strange changes", as capricious fate, the "whirligig of time".[32] This time Aikens was the most polular choice of ALP voters; indeed, by only the slimmest of margins did he fail to edge out the front-running candidate, Talbot Heatley. That rather mild disappoint-

ment was soon forgotten, however, when he was acclaimed Deputy Mayor of Townsville at the first meeting of the new Council.[33] Aikens was elected Deputy Mayor by six votes to five, a voting pattern which remained fairly constant throughtout the life of this Council.[34] Almost without exception, Paterson voted with the five ALP aldermen, and the Mayor with the four Ratepayer aldermen.

No sooner had the new Council concluded the formalities of taking control than Aikens insisted on the immediate implementation of "the most popular plank" in the ALP's electoral platform—the establishment of an Electrical Retailing Department.[35] There was some hesitation when doubt arose over the legality of Council participation in a time-payment scheme, but a Labor government in Brisbane offered no objections and very soon the Council Electricity Department opened a trading division for the sale of stoves.[36] Customers got their stoves by a smooth and utterly painless administrative process: all hire purchase charges were simply added to their monthly electricity accounts. As well, by diverting a substantial sum from the advertising of electricity (which naturally benefitted private electrical retailers at least as much as the Council) to the provision of municipal subsidy for haulage and installation, two more birds were despatched with but a single stone: overhead expenses were absorbed within the framework of existing public expenditure, and buyer resistance to even the minimal outlay for installation formerly charged was speedily overcome. By the end of 1939, the venture was accounted a "particularly successful" one, sales having "exceeded expectations".[37]

Apart from the inauguration of municipal electrical retailing, there was only the outbreak of world war to suggest to the citizens of Townsville that 1939 would be remembered as anything but a year of almost serene ordinariness. On the other hand, "phony" war in Europe could hardly be expected to have much impact in the somnolent Australian tropics. This was a year when Joe E. Brown reigned as the "Clown Prince of Mirth",[38] Constance Bennett and Brian Aherne no doubt convinced many "How Merrily We Live", others unquestionably agreed with Ann Sothern's studio that "She's Got Everything"; for cynics, misanthropes and others of more jaded tastes, there were the more saturnine exploits of "Torchy Blaine in Panama" (starring Paul Kelly and Lola Lane), but even these were devoid of the least hint of foreboding.[39] As for the more abiding concerns of Townsville's citizens, these were reflected in the activities of the government with which they most often came in contact,

the Townsville City Council; indeed a résumé of those activities is neither more nor less than a catalogue of citizens' priorities at that level of government bent on providing the irreducible *sine qua non* of civilized living. It therefore ought not to be surprising, though it somehow is for that time and place, that these should have included cultural, as well as much more practical and mundane considerations.

Still, it is true that in Townsville men mostly lived by bread alone—or at least water. In order to maintain the volume of stored water necessary to meet the requirements of the city, some 11 500 m^3 daily, a new and larger main was run from the Power House to the reservoir.[40] Also, during the year Council officers effected a complete remeasurement of residential premises for the purpose of rating;[41] the number of electricity consumers rose to 7284, or 434 more than in 1938, with correspondingly higher sales of electricity;[42] street improvements consisted of putting down 4 km of bitumen macadam road;[43] work commenced on the clearing, levelling and forming of runways at the new aerodrome;[44] the recently acquired municipal library was placed on a firm footing as a free lending institution;[45] plans were laid for the construction of a freshwater swimming pool on the Strand;[46] and the sea-wall was completed from the harbour's western breakwater to the existing salt-water city baths.[47]

When all was said and done these were mostly bread-and-butter jobs which any Council might have been expected to accomplish. Not even the most fanatic supporter of the ALP Council could claim that they were hastening the arrival of a socialist millenium. Suddenly, however, the war in Europe moved closer to Townsville and Utopia paradoxically hove into sight.

6

"The Fiery Cross Will Go Forth"

War may not be the father of all things. It is nonetheless true that World War II fathered in Townsville a socialist society, or as near to one as any Australian has seen on his own shores. Between 1939 and 1949 a City Council controlled by Hermit Park ALP and communist aldermen effected the public ownership of a remarkable range of utilities and services, insistently pushing to the limits its constitutional and statutory powers to do so. During and immediately after the war, the Council established a Ladies' Rest Room (later incorporating a free baby-stroller service for mothers shopping in the city[1]), a Wood Depot, a Fruit and Vegetable Mart, a Legal Aid Department, a Municipal Ice Works, and a Child Care Centre; by 1949 plans were well in hand for the development of "workers' housing", a people's bakery, and the "municipalization" of all bus services, when the Hermit Park ALP finally fell from power.

While the socialization of "communal enterprises"[2] was of course foreshadowed in Aikens' electrical retailing venture (and, to be sure, enjoined by the ALP local government platform[3]), there was little further progress towards this goal before 1943. For one thing, the Hermit Park aldermen were still insecure in their governing role. Although the communist alderman, Paterson, kept his 1939 pre-election promise to vote with the ALP in Council meetings, ALP aldermen were wary of his embrace, mainly because Paterson held the balance of power and could without too much difficulty represent the decisiveness of his vote as a triumph for communist policy. More importantly, however, the Hermit Park ALP was for a considerable time riven by internal dissension over the ultimate compatibility of communism and socialism.[4] There were bitter confrontations in the ALP between those who thought that some accommodation with communism could eventually be found and those who did not. Even in society at large tempers were frayed. The instance of

one priest in Townsville who was so upset at the prospect of a communist uprising that he prepared himself for martyrdom was perhaps atypical of the public mood but not of extreme partisan feeling.[5] In the end, socialism came to Townsville not in fulfilment of any agreed socialist plan but rather as a series of *ad hoc* responses by socialists—factious and contentious socialists—to the exigencies of war. During the course of 1942 fortress Townsville was constructed as a vital staging centre and forward command post for the Pacific war theatre.

One outcome of the ideological struggle in the Hermit Park ALP during 1941 and 1942 was that the bond of sympathy between the Hermit Park ALP and the Communist Party, arising from their close, if cautious, working relationship on the Townsville City Council, grew stronger than ever. It was decided that the two parties should present a "popular front" to the electors at the municipal poll due early in 1943. (Triennial local government elections were originally scheduled for 1942, but they were postponed by the Queensland government when it seemed possible, early in that year, that Australia would have to fend off a Japanese invasion.)[6] Aikens, with his peculiar genius for sensing and articulating the innermost thoughts, hopes and fears of his people, took what was in the circumstances the courageous stand that the people could not be expected to make unlimited sacrifices for the sake of the war effort: "I said we've got to assist the war effort, to the very limit of our ability; but in assisting the war effort we have to see that the rights and privileges of our civilian population are not trampled underfoot."[7] It was a telling attitude, and Townsvilleans subsequently took pride in remaining uncowed by an overpowering military presence among them. Indeed, Tom's ringing phrases, defiant but reasonable, became slogans for so long that their authorship was finally forgotten and "not-being-trampled-underfoot" became part of the conventional wisdom of the day.

Food, fuel and housing shortages had become acute by the end of 1942; by promising to end them the "popular front" won a resounding victory at the polls on 1 May 1943.[8] Aikens received the largest number of votes, heading a seven-man Hermit Park team of Corcoran, Hamilton, Illich, Abercrombie, O'Brien, Murgatroyd and himself.[9]

Arthur Murgatroyd had actually taken his seat on the Council some time before, on 23 January 1942, following the resignation of Alderman Heatley.[10] A man of small stature, but never at a loss for words, "the little rooster" was an indefatigable toiler for the ALP. When he first stood for elected office in 1939, he

had already held more official positions within the labour movement than any other person in Townsville—Honorary Secretary of the Hermit Park ALP, the Herbert Federal Divisional Executive of the ALP, the Townsville Combined Municipal Executive of the ALP and *The Clarion*, northern ALP newspaper. He was campaign director to George Martens, federal Member for Herbert, in the 1934 and 1937 national elections; to Jack Dash in the 1935 and 1938 state campaigns in Mundingburra; and to the Labor teams in the 1933, 1936 and 1939 municipal campaigns. On a slightly less frenetic political level, he was elected President of the North Queensland branch of the Federated Clerks' Union of Australia in 1938 and again in 1939.[11]

The only two new faces in 1943 were those of J.J. ("Jack") Abercrombie and E.P. ("Pooger") O'Brien. Although both were railwaymen and prominent in ARU affairs, they had absolutely nothing else in common. Abercrombie was a tolerant, sincere, unassuming family man whose smiling, even-handed equanimity later made him almost a permanent fixture in the chair of the NQLP. O'Brien was a wild, impulsive firebrand whose politics lurched much more violently to the left even than Aikens' and whose name already appeared on federal security files under the heading, "Communist Party—Consolidated List of Persons with Communistic Tendencies who are at present Resident in North Queensland".[12]

Of the three communist candidates, Paterson was the only one (for the time being) to take his place at the Council table. Apart from the Mayor, J.S. Gill, whom the Hermit Park aldermen looked upon as their "respectable front", only two aldermen, Parry and Mindham, were left to constitute an ineffectual "Tory" opposition. This opposition was weakened still further early in 1944 by the death of Alderman Mindham.[13]

The Hermit Park ALP–Communist Party coalition, or, as it rather grandiloquently styled itself, the "Greater Townsville Labor Party" was a close, if somewhat morganatic, union. The coalition would have been quite formal except for the fact that the communist alderman (and later, aldermen) did not participate in the Hermit Park municipal Caucus nor any other joint consultative body. However, the two parties went to the polls as a united team under a single banner and gave each other frequent, "informal" assurances of mutual support. The intimacy of the collaboration was clearly revealed when, in 1944, two more Communist Party nominees, Matzkows and Hills, were appointed to fill casual aldermanic vacancies.[14]

The new Council moved swiftly to fulfil its election promises to combat "profiteering, waste and unnecessary interference with civilians".[15] By now the war had moved away from the immediate vicinity of Townsville and many evacuees were returning to their homes to find themselves dispossessed by the military. At Aikens' prodding, the Council promptly inaugurated a Legal Aid Department to provide free legal advice for such aggrieved householders.[16] There were undoubtedly cases of gross official callousness towards civilians. There was, for example, Mrs Sarah Jane Grant who had lost her husband and whose only son was in the fighting forces. She went south for a while, leaving her house in the hands of an agent; the agent might rent it if he could find a tenant, but she would require the tenant to vacate the premises as soon as she returned. Subsequently, when the new tenant was advised that the widow was returning, he contacted the Air Force with advice that the owner was away; the RAAF, under a National Security order, promptly seized the house and all its contents—even the widow's clothes and wedding gifts. The widow went to court but lost her case on a technicality: the Minister for the Army referred to the occupants of the house as "personnel employed on important duties directly associated with the prosecution of the war".[17]

Aikens' advocacy of the widow's cause brought her nationwide publicity; eventually, the file labelled "Mrs Sarah Jane Grant" was one of the fattest in Department of the Army headquarters in Melbourne. An official report of the Townsville City Council noted the "strong public feeling" aroused by the affair. When it was proved that the widow's home was occupied by non-combatant members of the Department of Civil Aviation, Tom saw to it that every newspaper in Australia carried the lurid details of "what must surely be the war's most scandalous case of military persecution and poo-bahism".[18] He was not alone in his opinion. A scion of one of Townsville's oldest and most staid legal firms, George Roberts, who had no love for Aikens and indeed found his brand of clamant radicalism unnecessary if not vulgar, was nevertheless forced to agree that bureaucratic treatment of the widow Grant had been "iniquitous".[19] There were many other cases of military abuse of the rights of Townsville householders, which Tom angrily exposed and noisily disseminated. One concerned an impressed house where "the plunge bath had been torn away from its plumbing fixtures and deposited in the centre of one of the bedrooms. The bath was being used . . . as a beer-cooler . . . bottled beer packed in ice".[20]

The influx of Australian and United States military personnel,

trebling Townsville's population by the middle of 1943, [21] had other repercussions which were both more widespread and more frightening to the civilian population. In particular, there were serious shortages of food and other essential commodities. Possibly the most desperate of these might have been borne if shared; adversity under such conditions could even be ennobling. But all too often the military (that is to say, of course, the remote and preoccupied federal government) appeared stonily indifferent to the town's most pressing needs. The military indulged in spasms of alternate hoarding and wastefulness, which an impotent citizenry could only watch with mounting rage. By about the middle of 1943 the army had, among other things, accumulated a stockpile of 5000 tonnes of firewood in the centre of the Townsville Showgrounds;[22] and in that curiously distant and blissfully ignorant age, when trees were the main source of cooking fuel and smoke billowed endlessly from the stove chimneys of at least as many homes as it did not, a shortage of firewood was an alarming deprivation. The townspeople chafed at military requisitioning of all normal supplies and, despite early warnings of an impending crisis from the civil authorities,[23] the situation only worsened. On one occasion, in July, the Council furiously asked the Minister for the Army why soldiers were employed in the Townsville Railways' Goods Yard "guarding beer and spirits which is the property of private breweries and merchants, why they are employed at private bakeries and also employed for private contractors, but are not available to assist in providing supplies of firewood for civilians who are engaged on essential work?"[24] Eventually, but only by dint of repeated protestations, the army agreed to a system of Council control over, and rationing of, firewood. The Council initative led to the establishment and successful operation of a Municipal Firewood Depot, and civilians were thus granted equality of access "with white ants" to the army wood-heap.[25]

Shortages created by war are rarely absolute; rather, they manifest themselves in a number of familiar stages of relatively diminishing supply. First, a shortage of manpower leads to the curtailment of facilities for local distribution; by the end of 1942 in Townsville deliveries of meat, ice and bread had practically ceased.[26] Second, a scarcity of local and imported produce results in either rising prices or controlled, pre-emptive rationing; an example of the former in Townsville was the prevalence of "exorbitant" prices for fruit and vegetables by the end of 1942,[27] and, of the latter, the Council's concern to make available to milk bars and cafés "only milk not required by children".[28] A

third stage of grave scarcity produces racketeering and black markets, which are often most rampant and exploitative in the clandestine disposal of luxury (and especially addictive) goods such as alcohol and tobacco. In Townsville, as Tom Aikens sadly observed, "black marketeering was rife; ordinary bottles of whisky that usually sold for 22/– fetched £5 a bottle, and often the barmaid added another quid for herself. For a hundred other articles, from toothbrushes to tinned peaches, you had to buy something else as well to get what you wanted. I was absolutely astonished to see the greed, cupidity and avarice of a lot of our citizens."[29] On the whole, however, there were only intermittent shortages of most foodstuffs. Beef, for example, was sometimes unavailable, but only an Australian worker could complain about having nothing to eat "for weeks and weeks" but lamb, fish and liver.[30] In fact, foodstuffs in persistently short supply were limited to fruit and vegetables—until the socialist City Council again stepped into the breech with another of its audacious schemes for municipal purchase, distribution and sale.

Following several ineffectual representations to federal and state authorities,[31] the Council, at the instigation of Alderman Paterson, ordered an investigation into the feasibility of establishing "municipal shops and/or stalls for the sale of fruit and vegetables".[32] That was in January 1943. In April the Council launched its Municipal Fruit and Vegetable Trading Department, and the Hermit Park ALP included in its coming election platform a promise to expand this sphere of activities.[33] In June, a month after being returned to office, the Council advertised for an Organizing Manager,[34] and an appointment to this position (carrying a salary of £450 per annum) was subsequently made in January 1944.[35] In its first full year of operation, the Mart's marketing proved outstandingly successful; fruit and vegetable prices dropped by about half, and plans were announced for a further extension of the department's activities by the acquisition of a mobile suburban unit.[36] In a gesture of triumphal generosity, the Council celebrated the first anniversary of the opening of the Mart by instructing its manager to send a parcel of fruit to every patient in the city's general and private hospitals.[37] As Tom Aikens exulted, "this was really what socialism was all about".

More important even than firewood in the basic economy of North Queensland was ice, and the shortage of ice became the most popular symbol of bureaucratic and military enormity, a *cause célèbre* with which to berate the real "enemies" of the people—the state and federal governments that had "signally

failed" them.[38] By the same token, the Council's determination to overcome that shortage assumed tangible form in its largest and most ambitious municipal undertaking, an ice-works. "If a civilian walked into an Australian or an American army establishment," noted Tom Aikens, "he would invariably see whole wash tubs full of ice with a few bottles of soft drink floating in them. On the other hand, the people couldn't get even a sliver of ice to keep their milk and butter—that is, if they could get any milk and butter."[39] At the largest of the several ice-works, Vardy's in Ogden Street, queues 80m long formed by the time the works opened at 5 a.m.; some of the people actually slept on the works' saw-bench to make sure they got their meagre ration.[40] That was not much. Most people arrived hopefully with a sugar bag, but rarely left with more than one small block: Vardy's preferred to sell their output to the army at a higher price.[41]

Never in Townsville's history were so many sugar bags to be simultaneously seen as in the war-time ice queues in Ogden Street. The "Queensland portmanteau", as some called it, was very likely everyman's most prized possession. Instead of being carried in the hand like an ordinary suitcase, it was slung over the shoulder; indeed, possibly the most significant of its attributes was that it could be dropped, kicked about, even trampled upon with impunity. It never lost its shape or character. It was also very light when empty, and some preferred to roll it up into a bundle, tied together with a piece of string or rope yarn, and tuck it under the armpit. As the citizens of Townsville knew, the sugar bag was good not only for carrying blocks of ice but also for unobtrusively handling large quantitites of crab bait, horse manure and (provided it had been boiled once or twice) even the groceries, bread and weekend joint. It got a little faded after a few boilings but hardly ever deteriorated or lost its durability and versatility. For example, with two slits in the sides for arms and a much larger one for the head, it was a highly regarded football jersey; or, when one corner was poked into the other, so that it bore a vague resemblance to Little Red Riding Hood's cape, it was the most versatile of raincoats. In fact, nearly everyone in the ice queues brought along two sugar bags—one for the ice, another for downpours. Ogden Street often presented bizarre and fantastical scenes.

Tom Aikens was the first to draw attention to the urgency of solving "the vital question" of ice supplies for the civilian population of Townsville.[42] By the middle of 1943, the Council called tenders for the supply of an ice-making plant and

advertised for a manger of the proposed Municipal Ice Works.[43] An appointment was made at the beginning of 1944.[44]

This action came none too soon for, towards the end of 1943, there were definite signs of an imminent breakdown in civilian morale. There were "increasing and serious" complaints of profiteering and overcharging;[45] the sudden collapse of meat distribution appeared as the last straw added to the camel's load of unrelieved shortages.[46] There is no evidence that shortages were really more acute than earlier in the year, but their persistence was stretching civilian patience to breaking point. There was a feeling abroad that, for the vindictive political reason alone of "discrediting" the socialist Townsville City Council, both state and federal governments were prepared to sit idly by even though Townsville citizens were on "the verge of starvation".[47]

It was therefore a combination of endured hardships and frayed nerves—a sense of suffering "that had not been inflicted on any other citizens in Australia"[48]—which provoked enraged response from the Townsville City Council. In order to "arouse" the public to the "danger" threatening them, the Council decided on a vigorous radio and press campaign, as well as a series of public demonstrations.[49] Later, from the floor of the Queensland Legislative Assembly, Tom Aikens reminisced, "as a result of that campaign the Mayor of Townsville on 14 December received a long urgent wire from Mr. Murphy [federal government Food Controller] expressing concern at the press reports concerning Townsville's food supply and asking the Mayor for full particulars. . . . On 18 December 1943 Mr. Murphy flew to Townsville and met the Townsville City Council and representatives of responsible organizations."[50]

At a special meeting of the Council, the Food Controller accepted Aikens' invitation to visit the ice-works in the early hours of the morning of Saturday, 18 December. Since the Council did not adjourn until well past midnight, Aikens had a sleepless night: "I went back home and had a cup of tea and a piece of toast, then I rode my bike into town at 3 o'clock in the morning and dug Murphy out of his bed in Lowth's hotel."[51] They then left on an inspection of the various ice-works. At 5 a.m. they visited Vardy's where there was a queue along Ogden Street across Stanley and Blackwood Streets as far as the Railway Oval—about 1500 people. According to the *Bulletin*, "this estimate is borne out by the fact that Mr. Vardy delivered 1300 blocks, and the end of the queue were seen leaving at 6.30 a.m. without ice."[52] Later in the day, during an

inspection of another queue, the Food Controller was in time to see an ambulance leave "taking home a 15 year-old girl who had collapsed, owing to the heat and the crush".[53] The next day, Sunday, 19 December 1943, the Council's campaign against government neglect reached its climax in a mass meeting of Townsville citizens on the Strand. Aikens, introducing a team of Hermit Park and communist speakers, provided the keynote of the meeting: "If Murphy fails, then the fiery cross will go forth, and the standard of revolution will go up in Townsville."[54]

Mr Murphy took fright. Hastily returning to Canberra he reported gloomily on the atmosphere in Townsville as "so bad" that it could only have "a permanent adverse effect upon the feelings of United States personnel towards Australia and on the attitude of large bodies of Australian civilians towards the United States".[55] Appalled at the possibility of such grave perturbations to the nation's foreign policy the Prime Minister, John Curtin, directed the Director-General of Security to initiate an urgent and "most secret" inquiry into the situation in Townsville. Local operatives on the spot in Townsville were to treat the matter as "highly confidential" and "not to be talked about in any way".[56]

Blood did not flow in the streets, but the fact that it did not was more a tribute to the effectiveness of Council policies than to any assistance it subsequently received from government quarters. Indeed, no other community in Australia during World War II—and not only in the estimation of Townsvilleans themselves—was thrown back so rudely on its own resources in the face of such formidable odds: bombing, the threat of imminent invasion, evacuation, drastic shortages, protracted military occupation by forces far outnumbering the civilian population, and, perhaps most important of all, a sense of abandonment by government and of isolation from the mainstream of Australian life.

This consciousness of estrangement and its concomitant resentfulness were very evident in Tom Aikens' Strand speech, which, indeed, also contained the germ of the NQLP's permanent campaign slogan, "A Fair Go for the North". "In Queensland," Tom pointed out to his receptive audience, "more than half the seats in parliament are within a small radius of Brisbane, while nearly all the politicians live in the city. . . . In the federal government, Sydney and Melbourne control the destinies of Australia, and I can assure you that Sydney today is a land of milk and honey. . . . Where there is a food shortage in this State it is relieved as far as Brisbane is concerned, but

the government does not bother about Townsville's plight."[57] The crowd in Anzac Park roared its approval and appreciation.

Under the leadership of a small band of men from the Hermit Park ALP, the people of Townsville—at least the majority who stayed behind—on the whole comported themselves with dignity and pertinacity. It was even possible to suggest that, in the resourcefulness and precocity of its policies on behalf of Townsville and in the *élan* of its sallies against bureaucratic insensitivity, the Townsville City Council displayed those qualities of proud independence, aggressive egalitarianism, and contumacy, even rebelliousness, towards authority that made it seem an embodiment of the Australian myth. However, others saw it as an incarnation of "communism", or at least of unregenerate Jacobinism, and that was why the ALP expelled the Hermit Park branch from its ranks.

7

The Personal Rule of Townsville Tom

Aikens was expelled from the ALP about a year before the deregistration of the Hermit Park branch to which he belonged. In a bid for leadership of the working class in Tonsville, he came into head-on collision with a man of similar verve and pertinacity, Tom Dougherty, later General Secretary of Australia's largest union—the Australian Workers' Union—and thereby one of the two or three most powerful men in the entire labour movement.[1]

In 1939 Dougherty was District Secretary of the AWU in Townsville. He was a compelling figure, a man who made an instant mark. Aikens himself acknowledged: "it was not merely that he was of very good appearance and address, and a man who spoke sensibly; I have had Ministers of the Crown and prominent members of the old ALP tell me that they have never been more impressed by anybody at first meeting than they were with Tom Dougherty."[2] The two were bound to clash, each so very much alike in the strength of his ambition and ideological conviction, but each glowering at the other from opposite ideological poles within the ALP—Aikens on the Left, Dougherty on the Right.

Aikens already had good reason to be suspicious of the AWU in Townsville and in Brisbane. The inner cabal of the ALP's ruling body in Queensland, the Queensland Central Executive (QCE), whose members possessed impeccable, right-wing AWU credentials, had once before frustrated Aikens in the search for his political grail. In 1933, less than three years after arriving in Townsville, he had nominated for selection as an ALP aldermanic candidate at the municipal election of that year, only to have the QCE refuse his endorsement "because of insufficient membership qualifications".[3] Though technically correct at the time (Tom, like so many other working men short on cash or constantly moving about, was perfunctory in keeping his mem-

bership dues fully paid up), it seemed an incomprehensible decision in view of his already long experience in the labour movement both as union official and Deputy Chairman of the Shire Council in Cloncurry. Subsequently, Aikens' nomination as a candidate for the 1936 municipal election was approved,[4] presumably dispelling any lowering clouds of resentment.

But not for long. The death early in 1939 of the ALP state member of parliament for Townsville, M.P. ("Mossy") Hynes, coincided with Aikens' re-election to Town Hall in a poll that gave him only a handful of votes fewer than Talbot Heatley, the most conspicuously popular figure in the history of local government in the city. Townsville soon buzzed with the name of the man who was odds-on favourite to win the party plebiscite for selection as ALP candidate for Townsville, in succession to "Mossy" Hynes. All of Townsville, that is, except Tom Dougherty.

In the intervening years since 1936, the dignities and perquisites of elected office, far from moderating Aikens, had only made him more militant, more confident of the eventual realization of his socialist goals. Early in 1936, with civil war menacing in Spain and the Popular Front there already formed, the Labor Party in Queensland had taken pains to redefine its attitude towards communism.[5] All ALP branches throughout the state were instructed not to "participate in any movement originating from the Communist Party or any of its affiliations".[6] However, the actual outbreak of war in Spain had the same effect upon Aikens that it did upon legions of socialists all over the world, particularly those who possessed any sort of intellectual commitment to the socialist dogma: it not only rekindled their loyalties but invested them with crusading fervour. In Townsville, bastion of working-class radicalism, the Townsville branch of the ALP was first cautioned and suspended by the QCE,[7] then deregistered "because of wilful violation" of ALP Rules, including "association with anti-ALP bodies".[8] The Hermit Park branch now held aloft the banner of orthodox Labor in Townsville, annoying as it no doubt seemed to the QCE that the obstreperous Aikens, through his membership of Hermit Park, should have survived their recent purge. Another ploy therefore had to be devised to extirpate Aikens and the radicalism and contumacy which he personified.

Dougherty set out to strip Aikens of his power by alienating him from the other ALP aldermen of the municipal Caucus over which Aikens, as Deputy Mayor, presided. From the beginning of 1939 Aikens found himself regularly accosted by the other

Townsville Town Hall before demolition in 1978. Photo by courtesy of the *Townsville Daily Bulletin*.

ALP aldermen immediately before the monthly Thursday-night meetings of the full Council; and it invariably transpired that the purpose of these improvised encounters in the Town Hall vestibule was to tell the Deputy Mayor of their intention to flout Caucus decisions. Aikens soon discovered that, at the conclusion of the customary Sunday-morning Caucus meetings, his fellow aldermen repaired over the road to the Alexandra or Excelsior hotels (as Tom caustically said later, "wherever their credit was good at the time") where Dougherty received them in earnest conclave. His suspicions of collusion were amply confirmed when one of the aldermen suggested that Dougherty be given a seat at the Caucus table.[9] Aikens objected volubly.

Meanwhile, the QCE had received ten nominations to contest the plebiscite for official endorsement as the party's candidate for the Townsville seat. All were approved except that of Tom Aikens.[10] An outcry at once went up in Townsville against this cavalier treatment of the popular Deputy Mayor, the favourite son of the working class. There was "no more loyal Laborite" than Tom Aikens; the treatment meted out to him deserved "emphatic protest".[11] Aikens himself made no attempt to appeal against his exclusion from the plebiscite,[12] probably not in dudgeon but as a gesture of cool, political calculation: there were plenty of others only too eager to take up cudgels on his behalf. Indeed, in response to an avalanche of complaints, the QCE decided to re-open the matter and convene a special meeting to reconsider Aikens' case.[13] But there were sound reasons why Aikens' head had to roll, and the original decision was reaffirmed.[14]

There were in fact two reasons, one real and one spurious, for what to Aikens was an inexplicable rejection by the party he loved and which he had served so loyally and so long. How could one reconcile so manifestly unjust a decision as that just made by the QCE with his election earlier in the same month (April 1939), first as alderman then as Deputy Mayor of the city of Townsville?[15] How could one justify such aspersions cast on the party loyalty and credentials of a man just elected by the second-largest popular mandate in Townsville's history? Aikens knew that he was invulnerable to attack on political grounds; perhaps for that very reason he appeared the more vulnerable and unprepared for the sort of attack that came. The word was put around that Aikens had a flaw in his character which brought the party into electoral opprobrium and disfavour: he drank too much. This was the ostensible, the spurious reason.

There is no doubt that Aikens still tippled a lot, that he was

what a later generation would describe with growing concern as an alcoholic or at least a drinker with a "heavy" problem. But in his time and place it was a style of drinking that rarely drew censure or even comment. Australians were inured to it, and Tom had plenty of drinking mates both inside the party as well as outside. It was of course a habit he had acquired in the dry and sun-scorched plains of western Queensland. The characteristic mode of social drinking in the west was the "bender", in which station-hands, stockmen, shearers, miners, fossickers—men who normally spent weeks or months at toil in remote places—suddenly descended upon the pubs and brothels of towns like Hughenden, Richmond, Julia Creek and Cloncurry for wild binges lasting a weekend, a week or even a month. The railwaymen and workers living in the towns were sucked into the vortex of social swilling set up by their thirsty bush cousins.

There are indications that Aikens' drinking increased in the latter half of 1939 and in 1940, culminating in an attempt to remove him as Deputy Mayor "in view of [his] continued illness and present indisposition".[16] In a sense, it would have been surprising if his intake had not risen. At a crucial time in life for any man—he was now in his fortieth year—disappointments and setbacks seemed to crowd in upon him. There was the estrangement from his colleagues in Caucus; his exclusion from the plebiscite for the state parliamentary seat; the whispering campaign about his most spectacular vice and his unfitness to belong to the ALP; the crisis of conscience which every ardent socialist experienced about this time, when on 23 August 1939 communism and nazism, supposed to be ideological opposites, concluded the Nazi–Soviet Pact, stupefying the world; finally, there was the unexpected blow of having his enlistment in the armed forces rejected on medical grounds.[17]

And all the while there was the struggle with Dougherty for hegemony within the labour movement in Townsville. An issue typifying the mounting tension and antagonism between the two men concerned the implementation of one of Aikens' pet schemes —the granting of morning and afternoon "smokos" for Council employees on manual work. The pro-Dougherty faction of ALP aldermen naturally could not oppose so popular a working-class measure, and Aikens, vehemently supported by the communist alderman, Paterson, easily had it passed at the Council table.[18] However, Dougherty was opposed to the scheme because of a certain embarrassment which it caused him; the ten-minute morning and afternoon teas now available to AWU Council employees had not yet been won for AWU employees in other

occupations.[19] Aikens had clearly won this round in their fight for the title of working-class champion in Townsville.

But Aikens' insistent, even ostentatious, brand of radical socialism was anathema to the QCE and its minions. This was the real reason why he had to be destroyed. Earlier in the year, the QCE had made pointed reference to his "anti-ALP activities" and had accordingly blocked his attempted entry into state politics.[20] As the year went by, Aikens' popularity in Townsville waxed; not only that, he remained obdurate and unrepentant in his socialist zeal despite such transfiguring events as the Nazi–Soviet pact and the Soviet invasions of Poland and Finland. Not that Tom was a communist; on the contrary, he never tired of castigating communists for their "ceaseless, vituperative flood of anti-Labor propaganda".[21] Yet it remained true that many of his views coincided with those of the Communist Party and he could easily be seen by those with foggy spectacles or astigmatic vision as standing just to the left of the dividing line between the Labor Party and the Communist Party. For instance, he did not support the banning of the Communist Party in 1940; he also persisted in joining communists on the public platform in an attempt to persuade workers not to sign the National Register, thereby to many committing "a wilful act of disloyalty".[22] Finally, he and Fred Paterson—"Fulminating Freddie" to ALP stalwarts—were popularly regarded as the Siamese twins of Townsville local politics: close friends, tireless workers, bold initiators, relentless advocates. If even the percipient Fred could be so misled as to think Tom practically a convert (on one occasion forcing Aikens publicly to denounce him for trying to "deliberately segregate" the Deputy Mayor from the Labor Party and "brand" him as a supporter of the Communist Party), it was easy to see why Tom's popular image should be that of an unregenerate Bolshevik. Nor did he care much about dispelling the image, least of all among the more comfortable members of society. Possessed of an impish, slightly perverse, Irish sense of humour, nothing gave him greater mirth than to couple his socialist reputation with that of being a rabid republican and watch the ripples of shock spread through a disbelieving community. "I should be particularly loth to think," Tom deadpanned, "that I even owed any personal fealty or loyalty to some of the monuments of disease and degeneration that have disgraced the British throne in the past."[23] Of course that kind of talk convinced many that Aikens was a dangerous social incendiary.

Clearly the man had to be discredited; just as clearly the man's political popularity made this a formidable undertaking. When a frontal assault on Aikens' politics proved a miserable failure, his enemy tried the more insidious approach of undermining his character.

The initial political attack was launched as a movement to depose him as Deputy Mayor. It was alleged that some members of the Labor Party, among them "those who held representative positions", actually spoke off the same platform as members of the Communist Party;[24] that these renegades excused themselves by saying that they spoke not as members of the ALP but as officials or members of their unions; that they included Alderman Aikens in particular, whose conduct was "definitely having a detrimental effect upon the Labor movement in Townsville".[25] At a special meeting of the Hermit Park branch on 22 November 1939, it was successfully moved that Aikens be asked to tender his resignation as Deputy Mayor.[26]

Characteristically choosing offence as the best form of defence, Aikens refused to resign and instead began to muster his supporters in the party, those who gravitated towards the extreme Left of the party spectrum. His efforts met with notable success when, on 21 January 1940, he was re-elected Vice-President.[27] At the next monthly meeting of the branch, it was now Aikens' turn to move successfully that the QCE be asked to conduct "an impartial and comprehensive investigation into the political and industrial history of Alderman T. Aikens in order to convince the QCE that no valid reason operates for his non-endorsement by that body."[28] In order to impress on the QCE his indifference and contempt towards those fulminating against him, he also defiantly nominated for election to the federal Senate.[29] Later, disingenuously seeking an explanation for the QCE's expected, and indeed brusque, non-endorsement, the Hermit Park branch was told that the QCE did not have to give reasons for its actions.[30]

But if the QCE could prevent Aikens' explosion on to the state and federal stages, its attempts to stifle him locally were so far proving dismally ineffectual. The secondary, personal attack on Aikens was therefore launched with the aim of discrediting him completely and bringing about his expulsion both from the Hermit Park branch and the ALP. Bristling with anger, Tom received the brunt of the attack head-on: "If we are to consider that going on a bender or getting drunk warrants resignation from a public position, why do we not start with some at the very top of the party echelons—the Premier, for

instance? Then, when we've cleaned up all the drunks in the offices of the ALP, we can get stuck into the adulterers, the swindlers, the wife beaters and child starvers." Tom's defence by defiance may have caught his opponents momentarily off guard, but it was scarcely calculated to temper their attitude towards him.

After a "bender", Aikens often recuperated in a Gordonvale pub, drying out under the benign and watchful eye of his mate, the licensee Jack Sullivan. In July 1940 Aikens was "on holidays"[31] from the Railways Department and forwarded an apology for his absence from the July monthly meeting of the Townsville City Council. The Mayor was also due to take his holidays in the following month and, at the July meeting, the motion was put and carried that "in view of the continued illness and present indisposition of the Deputy Mayor", Alderman Mindham be appointed Acting Mayor for the period of the Mayor's absence.[32]

Aikens was livid when he received word of this new attempt to defame and depose him, and again he proved more than a match for his detractors. There was statutory provision in the Local Government Act for the appointment of an Acting Mayor, but only when both the Mayor and Deputy Mayor were simultaneously absent or ill. Knowing this, Aikens hurried back to Townsville before Mayor Gill's departure, which had been his intention, denounced the "indubitably illegal" resolution and assumed the duties of Acting Mayor.[33] Alderman Mindham had accepted the acting mayoralty only because he believed it to be "some internal arrangement" between Aikens and the other ALP aldermen.[34] When he learnt that Aikens had been ignorant of the entire proceedings, he eagerly sought escape from his embarrassing position. There then occurred what must surely rank as one of the most extraordinary scenes in the history of Australian local government:

"Tom, I tell you what I will do. I have been elected to office by a full meeting of the Council; but it will satisfy my conscience if you order me from the mayoral chair in the presence of the Town Clerk."

Aikens summoned the Town Clerk: "Charlie Mindham, you are illegally occupying the mayoral chair. I order you to vacate it and restore to me my rights".

Alderman Mindham hastily took his hat and left.[35]

For the next month Aikens became virtual dictator of Townsville. In a final, desperate attempt to remove him, the other ALP

aldermen took the unprecedented step of boycotting both Committee meetings and the full Council meeting in August. All scheduled meetings lapsed for want of quorums, and at four of the five Committee meetings Aikens was the only alderman present. Immediately before the scheduled meeting of the full Council on 15 August, which in normal circumstances would have brought down the city's annual budget, Aikens was advised by the City Accountant that, unless the rate were officially struck, the Council would soon have insufficient resources to meet its wages' bills.[36] Moreover, as a calculated strategem in the ALP conspiracy to discredit Aikens, the chairman of the Finance Committee had refused to countersign the usual pay cheque. As soon as the full meeting of Council lapsed, Aikens ordered the Town Clerk quietly to accumulate cash-over-the-counter takings and to pay Council employees from this unbanked reserve. Aikens himself tells the story with relish:

> Word got around that the employees weren't going to get paid, that there was no money in the till "because of that drunk Aikens". So on pay day a large crowd of men and women gathered in the vestibule of the Town Hall. They were murmuring and restive. Eventually, three or four fellows plucked up enough courage to start up the stairs—gingerly at first, but more brazenly with every step they took. When they reached the top, one shouted: "We're here for our pay, but we know there won't be any; the women and kids will starve because of Aikens." But the pay clerk called them forward and, with enormous dignity tempered only by a look of mild surprise, said, "Here is your pay." And there they were—the pay envelopes—all nicely stacked up, with the pay sheets ready to sign. The men just stared at him in blank disbelief; and as soon as the crowd saw them retreating sheepishly down the stairs there was a joyous rush upstairs. Naturally, I was keen to get as much publicity for myself as I could, so I called some press reporters into the Mayor's parlour and gave them a prepared statement. Just at that moment, the Finance Committee burst in and the chairman said, "We are here to sign the pay cheque." I said, "Too late, you're too late; you can sign it next week if you like, but I don't much care when you sign it."[37]

Aikens was fast transforming a seemingly hopeless situation into a personal political triumph: the attempt by his colleagues to depose and ostracize him had backfired. Indeed, far from being even remotely discredited, Aikens was now appearing as the saviour of the city and the cynosure of working-class acclaim. The local newspaper gave prominence to his civic exhortation which was quite Churchillian in its back-to-the-wall, tear-jerking force.

> A great burden has been thrown upon me, but I am determined to carry it through. I want to pay a tribute to the executive officers of the Council, all of whom, knowing the impregnability of my legal position, have rallied loyally around me and been of inestimable help and assistance in my endeavour to keep the people's ship afloat. . . . I have dealt with as much of the business as possible, secure in the belief that I am right, and that the great majority of the people will support me.[38]

Aikens' party opponents were now implacable in their determination to be rid of hin. On 4 August a special meeting of the Hermit Park branch was called "to discuss the position that had arisen in regard to the Deputy Mayorship of the Townsville City Council".[39] A sub-committee was formed "to take all steps necessary to arrange to bring about the resignation from the Deputy Mayorship of Alderman Aikens";[40] and Dougherty, at last making his entrance from the wings, proposed that the next meeting of the branch "deal with Alderman Aikens in conformity with Rule 105 for failing to carry out the instructions of the Labor Municipal Caucus".[41] However, another motion of no confidence in Aikens as Labor Deputy Mayor was withdrawn.[42]

Aikens was charged by letter. At the scheduled meeting of the branch on 18 August, he formally denied the charges made against him.[43] Dougherty at once moved Aikens' expulsion from the Hermit Park branch of the Australian Labor Party. Aikens' supporters moved an amendment that the charges against the Deputy Mayor be referred back to the municipal Caucus and that they be dealt with by that body.[44] The amendment was defeated, but Aikens' men filibustered by gaining the suspension of Standing Orders to permit a full and unfettered discussion of Dougherty's motion. When, after long and heated wrangling, the motion was finally put and passed, although only by the narrow margin of twenty-four to nineteen,[45] the understanding prevailed that Aikens' membership was merely being suspended temporarily "as a disciplinary measure", but not withdrawn; later, after a decent interval, a suitably contrite Aikens would be invited to resume his membership.[46] However, in a few weeks, the QCE officially expelled him from the ALP.[47]

Aikens never again became a member of the ALP, though he did resume his membership of the Hermit Park branch. The explanation for that apparent anomaly consists in the fact that the branch itself was presently expelled from the ALP. By an astonishing quirk of fate, Tom Aikens leaped back on to his political platform; then, by equally astonishing political aplomb

and in defiance of every accepted canon of political survival, he made the Hermit Park branch into the dominant political force in Townsville, slaying the Goliath of the ALP and reversing the political behaviour of a generation.

8

Hermit Park Jacobinism

Just as, historically, those Catholics who persisted in defying the Pope were on the whole the least zealous in their religion, so the most zealous of socialists in the first half of the twentieth century were those whose faith in Russia remained unshakeable the longest. True, the faith of many such votaries was severely strained at the time of the Nazi–Soviet Pact and the subsequent Russian invasions of Poland and Finland: a generation more versed in ideology than in power politics was dumbfounded. But it could still be argued that the Nazi–Soviet alliance, like that between Napoleon and Alexander I, was never a warm nor willing one, and that both parties, foreseeing war with each other, had probably entered it mainly to gain time. A strong "Hands Off Russia" movement therefore persisted in the world's socialist parties, including Australia's, despite official ALP policy which proscribed any affiliations with communism and even prohibited ALP members from speaking at meetings also patronized by communists.[1] By the middle of 1941, however, Hitler had invaded Russia, the only qualm of conscience was thereby dissipated, and the protagonists of "Hands off Russia", until then forced into a defensive posture, sallied forth with a vigorous campaign in direct support of Russia. Increasing numbers of Labor men publicly declared their sympathies for Russia and for various organizations in Australia marshalling financial and material aid for the Russians. The thoughts of the federal Labor Member for Herbert, north Queensland's most populous electorate based on Townsville, were typically frank and evocative. In a personal letter to Arthur Murgatroyd, secretary of the Hermit Park branch, the tone of his remarks was even passionate: "I will just say this—if it was not for Russia, Germany would have smashed everything in England to pieces before now. With all due respect to any other opinion, I believe that if Hitler had not attacked Russia, and had spent

the same energy and shown the same determination of beating Britain, my firm belief is that the British Empire would be no more."[2]

One pro-Russian organization was the "Aid to Russia" Committee, a branch of which was formed in Townsville in August 1941. Although the initiative for the formation of the committee came from Aikens' close friend and ideological cousin, the communist alderman, Fred Paterson, the committee was coaxed into existence at a public meeting, and subsequently convened, by the city's respected and politically unexceptionable first citizen, Mayor J.S. Gill himself.[3] Shortly afterwards, during October, the Council decided to nominate two official representatives for appointment to the committee. These were aldermen Mindham and Hamilton.[4] Two other aldermen, Corcoran and Illich, were the nominees of the Hermit Park ALP.

Since no less a figure than the British Prime Minister's wife, Clementine Churchill, lent her patronage to the international organization of "Medical Aid to Russia", it had unprecedented popularity in Townsville. Public support may have stopped short of massed, torchlit processions and patriotic afternoon teas, but city streets were cordoned off, stalls on every corner sold pikelets and lamingtons, and an unheard of sum of money was accumulated. "As a matter of fact," Tom noted somewhat sardonically, "it got as much public backing as it did probably because most people saw it was the only chance they would ever have of mixing with the upper crust of Townsville society. There were Methodist parsons, leading businessmen, R.S.L. officials—every Tom, Dick and Harry was in it."[5] Though himself no longer a member of the ALP, Aikens as Deputy Mayor chaired the committee in Gill's absence, which delighted Tom as much as it infuriated his ALP opponents.

Meanwhile, faced by mounting internal pressure, the ALP was in the process of redefining its policy towards communist and communist-front organizations. On 2 September 1941 the federal leader of the parliamentary Labor Party in Opposition, John Curtin, issued a public manifesto denouncing any attempts to compromise Labor principles. "The Labor Party throughout the two years of war has resolutely refused to have anything to do with political intrigue and with seeking after advantage and position. We have said that we would give our all; our record has shown that we have done that. And we will continue to do so. . . . I make [this] statement because I know the mind of the workers of Australia. They want none of manoeuvres and jockeying for position. Least of all do they want a Labor

Government that would be but the miserable echo of the name. Their pledge, and our pledge, is to Australia."[6] Promptly translating that manifesto into policy specifics, the Federal Executive of the ALP "[welcomed] Russia as one of our Allies and [congratulated] the people of that country on their magnificent fight against Nazi aggression", and approved the necessity of concluding military, diplomatic and trade pacts with Russia, but excoriated the attempts by the Communist Party "to capitalize for their own purposes on the magnificent effort of the Russian people".[7] The ALP's attitude towards the Communist Party and its subsidiaries therefore remained one of "hostility, warning, and suspicion".[8]

With almost indecent haste (in view of the fact that its actions had yet to be endorsed by the full assemblage of the QCE), the Inner Executive on 4 September framed its own declaration in terms only slightly different from those of the Federal Executive.[9] The organizations placed under interdict in Queensland were the "Australia–Soviet Friendship League", the "Australian–Russian Association", and other "kindred" bodies.[10] A circular embodying this declaration was at once despatched to all organizations affiliated with the QCE.[11]

There was swift and excited response from a wide cross-section of working-class organizations. "Protests" came from the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, the Plumbers' and Gasfitters' Union (Brisbane), the Waterside Workers' Federation (Townsville), the Queensland Life and Fire Insurance Employees' Union, the Australian Builders Labourers' Federation, and the Bulimba (Brisbane) branch of the ALP; "opposition" was voiced by the Wilston–Grange (Brisbane) ALP and the Federated Storemen and Packers' Union; "rejection" was demanded by the Kelvin Grove–Newmarket (Brisbane) ALP; and the United Operative Bricklayers' Society registered an emphatic "objection".[12]

The Hermit Park ALP had not participated in this outcry against the QCE, undoubtedly for the very good reason that "Aid to Russia" was not among the organizations named in the circular of 5 September. Indeed, the ALP Federal Executive had specifically exempted from proscription the body known as "Medical Aid to Russia" because it was in fact an affiliate of the International Red Cross.[13] And of course in Townsville everyone knew that "Aid to Russia" was above reproach, patronized by the loyal and dignified old Mayor Gill and propped up by a heterogeneous membership of clergy and prominent businessmen. Possibly the QCE would have remained forever

ignorant of its existence but for the disgruntled allegations of one man,[14] which were the immediate cause, on 10 November 1941, of a letter from the QCE to the Hermit Park branch asking it to "define the position of members of the Hermit Park ALP supporting the Townsville 'Aid to Russia' Committee".[15]

Tom Aikens watched the storm clouds gathering with ironic interest and detachment. ALP leaders in Brisbane were now turning on the party rank and file in Townsville. As he explained ominously to one of the party faithful who begged him to throw some light on this inexplicable development, "men like Forgan Smith who hold absolute power for so long not only get very crotchety but they start to behave, as we say in the West, 'like an old cattle dog', who will even bite his master."

Certainly a dispute appeared to be developing as the rather unbelievable, even ludicrous, result of widespread confusion over nomenclature, for only now did the QCE decide that "Aid to Russia" was also a "Communist subsidiary organization".[16] Lest others should fall into similar error, another circular letter, supplemental to that of 5 September, went out on 19 November to all ALP branches in Queensland, adding "Aid to Russia" to the index of banned bodies.[17] Party members were enjoined "not to address meetings or take part in the business or any other activity of [the] communist Party subsidiaries".[18]

The Hermit Park branch at once repudiated the QCE directive; by twenty-eight votes to six it decided to retain its delegates on the Townsville "Aid to Russia" Committee because of its "non-political and non-sectarian" character.[19] "Only a very small minority [of the membership of "Aid to Russa"] had anything approaching Communistic sympathies",[20] and its ALP members were in fact aldermen representing the City Council not only on "Aid to Russia" but also on other reputable community organizations such as the Australian Comforts' Fund for the armed forces. If the aldermen were forced to resign from the committee, this would be an "unwarranted interference with their citizen rights"; such duress, moreover, would only "give an impetus to any move by those sympathetic towards the Communists to gain control of the Committee".[21] It would be a "great loss" to the labour movement if Labor stalwarts, who had fought Labor's fight for up to forty years, withdrew from a committee which was "in existence simply to aid in securing a victory for the armies fighting for democracy in the present war". The author of these remarks, Hermit Park branch secretary, Arthur Murgatroyd, embellished his argument by claiming that the "Aid to Russia" Committee was already a

"registered patriotic body under the Act", and, if it were affiliated with an organization not acceptable to the QCE, this could only be, ironically, because the federal government had insisted upon such affiliation "as prerequisite to raising funds for the object for which it was established".[22] Actually, this was not a true claim at the time. "Aid to Russia" in Townsville was not registered under the Patriotic Funds Act until early in 1943.[23] Like all the other dramatis personae, Murgatroyd appears to have been vague about the difference between "Medical Aid to Russia" and a variety of other organizations, some of them communist, which were loosely grouped together under the general banner of "Aid to Russia". However, the difference in Townsville's case was never more than a technical one, for the *intention* had always been that the local "Aid to Russia" Committee should be identified with Clementine Churchill's international, "Medical Aid to Russia" body. The fact that the formal link did not occur until 1943 was merely an oversight on the part of the Townsville committee.

Arthur Murgatroyd.

For the time being, the QCE responded in fairly temperate terms, merely noting "with regret" the Hermit Park decision to continue its association with "Aid to Russia". For its part, anxious to prevent the hardening of attitudes and the intervention of precipitate decisions, the Hermit Park branch politely requested that a full inquiry be conducted into the differences between the two bodies.[24]

Then the hammer-blow fell. On 15 January 1942 the QCE advised Hermit Park that, in response to the branch's request, a full investigation would be held "as promptly as possible";[25] but *on the very same day* letters went out to aldermen Hamilton, Corcoran, Kogler and Illich, advising them that they had acted in contravention of resolutions both of the Federal Executive and the QCE of the ALP and that they had therefore, by their own actions, "left the Party". Similar letters went out to Jack Abercrombie, who was not yet an alderman, and to P.J. Eustace, who was the only heretic not actually a member of the Hermit Park branch.[26]

The decision to excommunicate, so to speak, had been taken by the QCE at a meeting on 12 January. Discussion at this meeting suggests that Abercrombie and Eustace, though not aldermen, were added to the list of renegades because they were endorsed candidates for the municipal election expected in 1942 (which, however, the state government postponed for a year because of the war emergency).[27] Eustace and Abercrombie at once appealed against the QCE decision, the former successfully, the latter in vain.[28]

When members of the Hermit Park branch assembled for their annual general meeting on 26 January 1942, they were in a truculent mood. Corcoran and Illich, whom the QCE had forbidden to attend meetings of the party, were elected President and Vice-President respectively.[29] By that single act of defiance, of course, the branch signified that it had no intention of deserting its comrades.[30] If a collision with the QCE were unavoidable, the QCE must bear sole responsibility; indeed, if the QCE persisted in its intransigent attitude, the entire labour movement in Townsville would be "smashed".[31]

Although the QCE remained unmoved,[32] such dire prophecies were not wholly without foundation: events were already producing a clear polarization of loyalties. In Brisbane, a mass meeting in the City Hall in support of "Aid to Russia" (31 October 1941) was indicative of the movement's growing momentum. The QCE launched investigations into the loyalties of branches and individual members,[33] subsequently withdrawing its recognition

from three ALP branches.[34] "Are these people, the QCE, attempting to bring about the same thing that occurred in New South Wales without realizing what they are doing?" expostulated George Martens, federal member for the Townsville seat of Herbert, with the secretary of the Hermit Park ALP, Arthur Murgatroyd.[35] "In Victoria they have done the same stupid thing—expelled them out of the Labor movement for being active in the Aid to Russia campaign. All I can say is 'God Bless Russia!' "[36]

Despite the menacing portents of branch deregistration in Brisbane, Hermit Park had not yet come under direct attack. For a time, it continued to plead with the QCE for the restitution of the rights of its most prominent members.[37] The QCE not only declined to relent, but also for the first time, on 3 August 1942, issued a threat that Hermit Park might also be called upon "to return all books and property of the Branch to the QCE".[38] The threat was carried out a month later.[39]

Since the dénouement had now come, the Hermit Park branch asked its friends to stand up and be counted. There seemed two possible avenues of support, local and national. First, was it not true that "the sympathy of the vast majority of true Labor supporters in Townsville"[40] went out to the men of the Hermit Park ALP? Second, would not a successful appeal to the federal ALP to vindicate their stand and exculpate their members have the effect of presenting the QCE with a triumphal *fait accompli*? Accordingly, on 21 September 1942, Murgatroyd wrote to all branches in the Mundingburra, Townsville and Kennedy electorates, asking them to declare their sympathies.[41] The following day, he wrote a similar letter to the Federal Executive of the ALP in Melbourne, setting out the circumstances of the dispute with the QCE and requesting the good offices of the coming Federal Conference of the ALP as arbiter.[42] In each case it was stressed that the QCE had so far laid no formal charges against the Hermit Park ALP, nor had it convened the "inquiry" promised several months before. Hermit Park had declined to refuse its President and Vice-President (Corcoran and Illich) admittance to its meetings; and it now wanted to know if its fellow branches and the federal ALP recognized Hermit Park as a branch of the ALP or whether they agreed with the "undemocratic and unjustifiable instructions received from the QCE".

Not even the darkest of human tragedies is wholly devoid of drollery, and the downfall of the Hermit Park ALP was not for everyone the only focus of their anguish and concern. Sheer

banality was not long dispelled by mighty questions of high principle. Among the manifold activities of the irrepressible Arthur Murgatroyd on behalf of the ALP, not the least was his position as Divisional Returning Officer for the federal electorate of Herbert. A federal election was imminent, and the nominations of all local aspirants for parliamentary honours closed with the QCE on 10 October. As soon as the sitting member for Herbert, George Martens, who lived nearly 3200 km away in Sydney, heard of the brouhaha in the north, he frantically wired Murgatroyd to see if his nomination had gone forward before the blow-up in Townsville.[43] It had not; for, in addition to being divested of the office of secretary of the Hermit Park ALP through its proscription by the QCE, on 1 October Murgatroyd also found himself relieved of any responsibility for the coming election. He received a telegram: "In view of your disloyalty to the ALP, the Queensland Central Executive have withdrawn their approval of your being Returning Officer for the forthcoming plebiscite for the selection of a Labor candidate for Herbert Stop please forward any books or property belonging to the Herbert Divisional Labor Executive to this office."[44] Martens was dismayed, but Murgatroyd, ever the loyal and hard-working servant of his party, decided that Martens' "interests [should] be protected and his nomination [put] in order".[45] Two days before the closing date for nominations, the official nomination form and pledge over Martens' signature was forwarded to Brisbane;[46] only then did Murgatroyd relinquish his duties as Returning Officer in obedience to the QCE's earlier despatch by telegram.[47] After his brusque, if not panic-stricken, exchange with Murgatroyd, a relieved Martens could now afford to resume his role as suave and generous lawgiver: "I hope that you will be yet on the job when some of those little-minded, power-drunk creatures [in the QCE] are known no more."[48]

Events now moved swiftly towards their inexorable conclusion. Murgatroyd received inside information from a sympathetic member of the QCE that no meeting of the QCE had ever in fact authorized the expulsion of the Hermit Park ALP and that "it [was] just another action by the Inner Executive itself".[49] The moral fillip provided by that information encouraged Hermit Park to address the QCE again with renewed confidence in the righteousness of their stand. A telegram from the QCE asking Murgatroyd if it was still his intention "to continue to be Secretary of the disbanded Hermit Park Branch ALP"[50] provoked a barrage of angry replies. "The petty Pooh-Bahs who imagine that they control the Labor movement may think that

the Hermit Park Branch of the ALP is dissolved, but, in reality, it is still energetically and constitutionally functioning";[51] it was to be deplored that the QCE had not acted "constitutionally and democratically instead of arrogantly and despotically";[52] the QCE would do well to advise the party "the date of the QCE meeting and the Rule under which [the] disbanding [was] allegedly effected".[53] The branch also decided to follow up its previous letter to the Federal Executive with another containing details of the new moral armament with which it was equipped, requesting Federal Conference to "countermand the advice of the QCE that the Branch is no longer a Branch of the ALP". The Hermit Park counter-charges listed in this letter (but not in the earlier, more cautious approach to the federal body on 22 September), became the basis of the branch's case in all later debates up to 1946 when the last hopes of reconciliation were dashed. They were:

> (i) The aldermen in question and the Branch have not been charged, neither had an investigation been held under the Rules and Constitution of the ALP, State of Queensland; (ii) The aldermen and Branch should have been notified which Rule was alleged to have been violated and also under which Rule the matter was dealt with; (iii) The matter has not been dealt with by a meeting of the QCE; (iv) Neither Aldermen Corcoran and Illich nor the Branch have been guilty of any violation of the Rules, Platform or Constitution of the ALP, State of Queensland; (v) The advice that the Branch is no longer a Branch of the ALP, State of Queensland, is legally and morally wrong, and is a grave injustice, and is totally opposed to democratic principles.[54]

Pending a dispensation from the august federal source, Hermit Park was resolved to continue the fight against the QCE.[55] Meanwhile, too, it found that it was not without allies in its struggle. Declarations of solidarity and support came from the Australian Railways' Union, the Builders' Employees' Federation, the Railways Salaried Officers' Union, the Vehicle Builders and Employees' Federation, the Federated Clerks' Union and the Townsville Trades and Labour Council.[56] However, when replies were eventually received from the sources in which Hermit Park had initially reposed its hopes—the federal body and local ALP branches—there were scant grounds for jubilation. Federal Executive blandly replied that the "rule of Federal Conference [was] . . . that no appeal can be made to Conference or the Executive unless leave to appeal be granted by the respective State Conference or State Executive."[57] Apparently consumed by fear or jealousy, the local branches

maintained a basilisk silence. For example, two of the branches, Townsville and Townsville (Kennedy), responded to the call from Hermit Park with a ploy that was tantamount to ignoring it: they simply forwarded the Hermit Park correspondence direct to the QCE. Another, Ayr, lost no time in making application to the QCE to be recognized as the new "Head Centre" of the Mundingburra State electorate in succession to Hermit Park.[58]

The tawdriest act in the increasingly obscurantist charade now unfolded: Arthur Murgatroyd was expelled from the ALP.[59] The earnest and energetic secretary of the Hermit Park ALP, devoted servant of the ALP in a variety of spheres, as alderman, Branch Secretary, Divisional Returning Officer, Union Secretary, was peremptorily dismissed for "continuous disloyalty".[60] In fact, Murgatroyd was the only member of the Hermit Park ALP to be singled out by the QCE for formal expulsion.[61] It was the unkindest cut of all.

The hackles of Hermit Park now stood out in rage. An ultimatum was served on all parliamentarians, state and federal, whose constituencies took in Townsville.[62] What was their attitude towards the "outrageous action" of the QCE? Did they agree that Hermit Park had not departed "in any manner whatsoever" from the principles, platform and objectives of the Labor Party, and that to bow to the QCE's decision would be "contrary to all democratic ideals"? Were they aware that Hermit Park was not only continuing to function as an ALP organization but was also prepared to launch a campaign for the "cleansing of the Labor Movement"? Did they know that Hermit Park, in its "determination to overthrow despotism", would shortly extend its activities and establish itself as a branch of the ALP "covering all approved Laborites in the Mundingburra, Townsville and Kennedy electorates"? If the honourable gentlemen did not define their attitude within a month, the branch would be forced to adopt the view that "those who are not with us are against us".[63]

The replies made up a fascinating collage of casuistic somersaulting. There was George Keyatta, for example, who had eventually succeeded "Mossy" Hynes in the state seat of Townsville at an election which attained local notoriety as "The Election of the Four B's", after the four candidates—"three barristers and a boong"—the last a reference to Keyatta's Levantine extraction and swarthy appearance. Although Aikens himself had been denied party endorsement to contest the plebiscite for selection as official ALP candidate, he had subsequently supported Keyatta's candidacy in opposition to the

AWU nominee. Tom assumed the self-appointed role of political tutor and personal adviser to George Keyatta:

> I said all you have to do is stand up straight at your meetings under the Tree of Knowledge, don't even mention your colouring, and say, "I'm very proud of my family, and if I have to choose between my family and a seat in parliament I will choose my family." Well, after that, George was no longer the "boong" but the underdog; he might as well have started packing his bags for Brisbane. But just to make sure, I used to get up on the platform with him on every conceivable occasion and quote Ingersoll until the crowd started looking at old George almost with tears in their eyes: "If every man for whom he has done some kind or loving service brings but one blossom to his grave, he will sleep beneath a wilderness of sweet flowers."[64]

Now, in the dispute between Hermit Park and the QCE, George Keyatta had good reason to be cautiously sympathetic towards the local renegades: "I personally do not hold with the decision", he said, "regarding the expulsion and it is my intention always to strive with the object of having the Branch and members readmitted."[65]

Then there was Jack Dash, Member for Mundingburra, the state seat extending southwards from Townsville to Ayr. Later, Tom Aikens not only took over Dash's electorate but also much of his political mien and method—the colourful and often extravagant oratory, the cold-blooded character assassination of opponents, the sentimental appeal to local grievances, the ebullient, not to say fire-and-brimstone, public personality. And Jack Dash was much more realistically blunt than George Keyatta: "the question you ask means which would I have my political head cut off by—the QCE or by the sympathisers of those members who have been declared outside the ALP? I have to adhere to decisions of the QCE."[66] "Nugget" Jesson, member for Kennedy, the state electorate stretching north of Townsville, replied not in his usual "high dungeon" but with a certain lofty aloofness: "I have to advise that I am prepared to stand by the pledge of the Platform of the Australian Labor Party, which is Australia-wide, and which I signed many years ago."[67] George Martens, federal member for Herbert, was querulously apprehensive: "it will be my misfortune if I have to be the scapegoat for something which has been done which I am not a party to, and I must leave the matter at that."[68] Senator Collings was imperiously indignant: "You know me well enough to know that intimidation will not work in my case."[69] His colleague, Senator Brown, was wistfully vague: "It is to be

deeply regretted that the present state of affairs has arisen with the Hermit Park Branch."[70] Senator Courtice was bureaucratically sententious: "Owing to being very busy in Canberra I have had no opportunity of securing information. The workers can only be defeated by being divided."[71]

The lukewarm and equivocal support of the politicians, far from daunting the rebels of Hermit Park, only spurred them on to new measures of defiance.[72] At the branch's final meeting for 1942, it was decided that unless the dispute with the QCE were satisfactorily settled by the time of the annual general meeting in January, a "strong team of candidates" would contest the municipal elections due early in 1943.[73] Since it was impossible to conceive of any "strong" team which did not include the increasingly popular Deputy Mayor, Tom Aikens, who meanwhile had been making "every post at the Council Table a winner",[74] the branch invited its prodigal son to return to the fold after more than two years in exile.

The fact that Tom in exile continued to hold Townsville in thrall with his mesmeric oratory, spoke volumes for his tenacity and resilience, for these two years were in fact the nadir of his political career and private life. The resilience came from having to fend for himself from a very early age. "You quickly learn to keep your own counsel", he later mused, "and not care too much about other people. You either accept or reject their viewpoints; you say to yourself, 'Well, how does that affect me?' It's not a question of being selfish but of never allowing yourself to be flattened or overwhelmed by anyone."[75] Similarly, his tenacity was a by-product of resilience, of never allowing defeat to affect him: "So, although I've been knocked back and I've lost some of the things I've wanted, later on you realize that you didn't really need them all that much; and once you've realized this you can hang on in the most gruelling of personal crises."[76]

In 1941 and 1942 full self-realization in these terms had not fully dawned on Tom, and he came close to breaking under the incubus of his tribulations. His political career lay in ruins; the reformist promises of his beloved Labor Party appeared shattered by internecine dissension; the war in the Pacific moved ever closer towards Townsville; thousands of people fled, soldiers began to arrive in a never-ending stream, placing an intolerable strain on the capacity of the city to absorb them. Municipal government seemed alternately stunned then paralyzed by the suddenness and magnitude of events and by the alienation of

the one leader whose acknowledged charisma was perhaps capable of rallying the citizenry of Townsville.

For Tom's drinking had taken control of him. The whole town gasped at the story of its Deputy Mayor lying in the gutter of a city street, clutching a gin bottle and mouthing obscenities. The benders grew longer and the intervals between them contracted. Tom's repartee, which usually cut as deftly, as quickly and as cleanly as a rapier, now parried the jeers and accusations as desperately, as viciously and as clumsily as a broken beer bottle.

"Hey, Tom, which gutter you been inspecting lately?"

"None. Wanna know why?"

"Why?"

"Because I heard what a big Negro buck did to you when you fell face down in one, and I wouldn't want that to happen to me."

"Hey, Tom, tell us about the time the dogs pissed on you."

"Well, that's true, but only well-bred dogs, not the mongrels who did it to you."

Margaret Aikens was a horrified onlooker at the degradation of her husband, yet she endured it in dour and stoic silence, the only way she knew how. Whenever Tom came home in a twisted stupor she weathered the inevitable tempest of abuse with unruffled dignity. Mercifully this was not very often because of the exigencies of driving trains, pub crawling and trying to keep a sobre Deputy Mayor in the public gaze. Margaret cooked the gargantuan meals Tom demanded and the cakes he gorged, and she watched in expressionless dismay as Tom grew physically into a gross and depraved hulk and shrivelled mentally into a vindictive, paranoid wreck. Once, towards the end of 1942, she recoiled in disgust from his drunken advances, whereupon Tom exploded in impotent and slobbering rage, "Don't worry. I won't touch you. I'd rather plunge it into a ripe pawpaw anyway."

Tom Aikens kept the one thing, however, which, if it had been lost, must surely have destroyed him—self-esteem. This, together with his colossal ego, derived from a sense of power which the verbal manipulation of others gave him. Together they proved indestructible. In his sobre periods, Tom Aikens was still a formidable presence. The two "lepers", Aikens and Paterson, drew closer together and, secretively hatching new schemes, gleefully threw the aldermanic majority off-balance. They connived, they intrigued, they whispered; they luxuriated in the curious, sidelong glances and suspicious frowns which the other

aldermen turned upon them. By comparison, the "Gunpowder Plot" was a very amateurish conspiracy, a schoolboyish machination. Moreover, the Council Table still provided the best political forum in Townsville, particularly as the *Bulletin* dutifully recorded every word that flowed across, around and under it. Out at Hermit Park, hardly a man believed that Tom's expulsion had been permanent; everyone thought he had been punished enough; no one doubted the wisdom of re-admitting him.

There were soon definite signs that Aikens' return and the unflinching attitude of the Hermit Park branch were causing concern to the QCE. In a letter to George Martens, Bryan, the QCE secretary, referred to the disbanding of Hermit Park and went on to say (which "somewhat surprised" Martens) that "the dissolving of the Branch does not mean that the members of the Branch have been expelled".[77] Bryan also hinted to Keyatta that "a further inquiry" would be made into the position of the Hermit Park branch "at the earliest opportunity".[78] It was finally decided that the long-awaited inquiry would be convened "as promptly as practical",[79] and that it would be conducted by no less a personage than the Deputy Premier himself, the Honourable E.M. ("Ned") Hanlon.[80]

Hanlon met Aikens, Corcoran and Illich in the Townsville Court House on 8 February 1943, and his recommendations to the QCE represented an unconditional capitulation to the demands of the Hermit Park branch.[81] "In view of all the circumstances," he reported back to the QCE, "I would recommend that the Hermit Park Branch be readmitted to the ALP and the position restored as it was before this dispute."[82] Pointedly cocking a snook at the QCE, Aikens celebrated the victory by presiding over a "monster public meeting" of the "Aid to Russia" Committee, commemorating the foundation of the "great, invincible Red Army", honouring the defenders of Stalingrad, and lauding "the heroes of Rostov and Kharkov".[83] Tom just could not resist the temptation to give vent to his histrionic propensities. Quite simply, he wanted to gloat. He had made enemies before on both Left and Right, and would make more in the future, because he was "too often carried away by his love of the dramatic".[84]

Indeed only a battle had been won, not the war. Hanlon's report was unexpectedly rejected by a special meeting of the QCE,[85] whereupon the Hermit Park branch embarked on an irreversible course of recrimination and radicalism. The QCE minuted no tally of its voting, but of course it was not long

Townsville Court House (Old Magistrates' Court). Photo by courtesy of the *Townsville Daily Bulletin*.

before precise details of its deliberations on Hanlon's report filtered through to Townsville. There had already been leaks from Hermit Park sympathizers (Jack Dash was one), but anyway, as Tom said, "these things all come out sooner or later; it's amazing in the political game, or in any game for that matter, how you get the true story if you wait long enough. You've only got to be patient."[86] In the event, Aikens' arch-enemy, Tom Dougherty, persuaded an AWU member to withdraw from the QCE meeting and nominate Dougherty as his proxy. The vote, after a passionate denunciation of Aikens by Dougherty, was nineteen to seventeen.[87] Thus, as Tom later reflected, "one man and one man alone was responsible for the formation of the North Queensland Labour Party; one man and one man alone was responsible for putting me into parliament. That man was Tom Dougherty. If the Hermit Park branch had been taken back into the ALP, I would have had no chance of entering parliament."[88]

There was only one further attempt at conciliation after the failure of Hanlon's mission. The astonishing successes of Hermit Park Labour at the 1943 municipal election, in which Aikens topped the poll, seven of the ten elected aldermen were Hermit Park rebels, and not a single ALP alderman was returned, convinced some ALP notables that the schism was fratricidal. Frenzied efforts to restore unity thus preceded the 1946 municipal election,[89] but by that time a 1943 pre-election marriage of convenience between Hermit Park Labour and the Communist Party had become a contented as well as mutually beneficial union. When, on the eve of the 1949 municipal election, the Hermit Park schismatics announced the formation of a North Queensland Labour Party, "incorporating the original Hermit Park ALP", this, to the ALP, was no more than the formal and belated acknowledgment of irreconcilable heresy.

Naturally it was not only local outrage at QCE "despotism" which resulted in such a dramatic reversal of ALP fortunes. Townsville was also at war, and probably no other community in Australia during World War II was thrown back quite so rudely on its own resources in the face of such daunting odds. At least that was the judgment not only of Townsvilleans themselves but also a host of surprised and concerned outsiders. All testified to the demoralization of a citizenry beleaguered by Japanese air raids, the threat of imminent invasion, widespread evacuation, protracted military occupation by forces heavily outnumbering the civilian population, persistent shortages of essential goods, a sense of isolation from the mainstream of

Australian life and of actual abandonment by remote and insensitive governments—of which the QCE's ostracism of the Hermit Park branch seemed a particularly crass and palpable example. As late as mid-1944, north Queenslanders still nurtured "an abiding sense" that southern governments in Brisbane and Canberra were ignorant of their total wartime experiences and indifferent to them. The chief spokesman of that mood was Tom Aikens and in 1944 Townsvilleans also elected him to parliament in Brisbane to evoke it, to shame and bludgeon Government with it.

9

Townsville Fortress

Shortly before midnight on Saturday, 25 July 1942, four Japanese raiders bombed Townsville.[1] Most people were in bed, but in Flinders Street there were still a few chattering groups, the remnants of those who had earlier debouched from the Roxy Theatre and stayed in town for a cup of coffee and a toasted sandwich.[2] It was three nights before full moon, the entire city was bathed in bright moonlight, and only a few white clouds flecked the sky.[3] At one of the armed forces' dances still in progress, someone at the door shouted, "Air raid, the sirens are going", whereupon lights were extinguished and people exited from the hall—some to drive away unconcernedly in their cars, others to seek the dubious safety of slit trenches.[4] In Flinders Street, police and air-raid wardens directed pedestrians with quiet efficiency and within ten minutes the main street was deserted.[5] From their trenches and concrete "pill-box" shelters, Townsvilleans strained to hear the drone of approaching planes which seemed a long time coming. It was not until twenty minutes after the initial wailing of the sirens that searchlights finally picked out the planes through the "thin, feathery layer of scudding cloud".[6] Inexplicably, the planes circled the town for more than half-an-hour, leisurely inspecting their targets, before making their bombing runs. Then there was "a swish, a swoosh, and a krunk krunk krunk; it was one shattering blast and the ground shook momentarily. . . . The sound of the planes gradually died away and it was all over."[7] To Sergeant T.C. Goode, a member of the Garrison Battalion, it seemed that "there were three bombs which dropped", hissing and exploding in "one long blast". The Camoufleur-in-Charge, North Queensland Area, reported that the bombs dropped some distance to the east of the wharves and landed in the sea, by which he meant the tidal flats near the power house and the mouth of Ross River.

Thus the residents of "Australia's only area with city status to be bombed by the Japs"[8] experienced their first taste of front-line warfare. There were three raids altogether: the first on Saturday night-Sunday morning, 25–26 July; the second at about 2 a.m. on the morning of Tuesday, 28 July; and the third just after midnight the following night, that is, on Wednesday, 29 July.[9] The second and third raids were each carried out by a single flying-boat. On the second occasion bombs were dropped near the Animal Health Station at Oonoonba, on the outskirts of the city, "harmlessly" lopping some palm trees. On the third occasion the raider was intercepted by allied fighters, jettisoning its bombs in the sea near Cape Pallarenda; after being "hit repeatedly" it was "last seen losing height and [was] believed to have been destroyed."

No one in Townsville was hurt, but admittedly it was the ineptness of the Japanese bombardiers rather than the efficiency of the city's defence which was the main reason for the citizens' lucky escape. Only a month before the raids the General Officer Commanding (North Queensland Area), General Milford, had bluntly described air-raid precautions in the city as "frankly unsatisfactory": there were "no adequate lighting restrictions and the people are quite uneducated as to the position generally. The local press refuses ARP publicity matter for fear of creating a scare. . . . With the lack of organization, over-crowding and great fire risk from wooden buildings, a raid would certainly have the most serious consequences for which the Army will not escape a share of responsibility.[10]

The first raiders, despite their taunting presence over the city of at least thirty-five minutes, went completely unchallenged except for some sporadic machine-gun fire which, however, was "apparently a mistake".[11] The second raid, at least according to the local newspaper, provoked "heavy opposition from the anti-aircraft defences", "skilful searchlight spotting" and "accurate fire" which must have caused "the occupants of the carrier of death and destruction a certain jolt"; but, since Townsville's anti-aircraft defences as late as May 1942 consisted of no more than one heavy battery of eight guns,[12] the "jolt" was probably a good deal less worrisome to the Japanese than journalistic enthusiasm allowed. More realistically, one official pondered that at least army and civilian defence organizations had had "another excellent practice".[13] Only the third raid met with the rather more determined resistance of a number of allied fighters which managed to get airborne before the enemy disappeared out to sea, and the pilot of one of the interceptors,

Slit trenches in war-time Flinders Street. Lowths Hotel is on the corner. Photo by courtesy of the *Townsville Daily Bulletin.*

a Captain John Mainwaring, thought that they might have made a kill "if only we had been a bit less excited".[14] At least the dogfight provided some spectacular fireworks for the populace "looking up from their cold slit trenches". The course of the fighters' tracer bullets was plainly outlined, and when a hit was

seen on the tail of the bomber "groups of onlookers cheered the fighters".[15] The tail actually caught fire, but for some reason it did not spread. The raider appeared to lose height temporarily but then regained it, and the flying-boat passed out of range of the searchlights.

One enthralled observer of the "Guy Fawkes' display" was Tom Aikens who had been working a train to Townsville when it was flagged down at Oonoonba. Ordered into a slit trench by a local ARP warden, he protested that if he were going to be killed by a Japanese bomb he would at least be "reasonably warm", so he refused to budge from the footplate of the engine.[16] His attitude was not atypical of that all over the town. There was no panic; there was, on the contrary, an air of "eerie" unreality about the whole experience. Some took precautions "because you feel a little scared; but you can't do anything, so there is no need to panic: it's no use."[17] Others remained in high spirits; there were even some who expressed disappointment when, on the first raid, "only one stick of bombs was dropped".[18] Everywhere there was calm, patience and cheerfulness.[19]

Townsville's phlegm under fire was remarkable because the initial reaction of her citizens to the outbreak of war had bordered very close on panic. Soon after Pearl Harbor, blackout regulations were enforced and all radio stations from Townsville north were ordered off the air after sunset; finally, after the fall of Lae in March 1942, schools were closed down. A hurried exodus to the south began, and by the middle of 1942 Townsville had lost nearly one-quarter of her population—some 5000–7000 souls.[20] "People were scared stiff", Tom Aikens observed. "You couldn't book a plane flight—not that there were many planes flying—you couldn't even make a trunk-line telephone call without first getting the permission of the military authorities. People just flocked away. They couldn't get on trains out of Townsville quick enough. They leased their homes for long periods, that is, if they could find anyone to walk in and take a lease, or they just walked out and left their homes empty; some simply gave their homes away."[21]

Mass flight from north Queensland was unquestionably encouraged by official unwillingness, or unpreparedness, to prevent it—indeed, by the apparent readiness of the Australian government to condone it. In February 1942, for example, local police and ARP wardens, acting under instructions from the Queensland Police Commissioner, carried out a house to house door-knock in north Queensland towns in order to estimate the number of women and children who might have to be evacuated.

Householders were informed that they were then at liberty to evacuate their families to any part of Queensland but that later, if conditions deteriorated, they might be ordered to specific evacuation centres without being given the opportunity of making a choice. When north Queenslanders were confronted on their very doorsteps with such evidence of official concern —indeed, of overt preparations being made to evacuate the north —it was scarcely surprising that dejection and consternation should have spread.[22] Not that north Queenslanders were alone in reacting thus to the threat of invasion. On 2 January 1942 the federal Minister for Home Security, Mr. H.P. Lazzarini, had contrasted the behaviour of Singapore under siege with that of the much less accessible if not wholly untouchable Sydney. "Singapore remained calm, there was no sign of panic and every man and woman was ready to fight; while in Sydney everybody worried, hundreds were going away to the mountains and country evacuation areas. Are the people of Australia more interested in taking cover than in getting on with the job of winning the war?"[23]

Australian leaders may have deplored the mass eagerness to decamp, but in fact at the root of incipient panic was the absence of leadership. Where the national government did not actually appear, as in north Queensland, to be actively preparing for evacuation, it gave the impression of vacillating indecision. Despite innumerable pleas for an explicit definition of government policy on evacuation,[24] the fledgling Labor government in Canberra floundered in a sea of uncertainty. On some occasions it gave the appearance of moving towards the final enunciation of a policy opposed to evacuation,[25] only later to compound public confusion by retreating to its former equivocal position. As late as July and August 1942, when so many thousands had already evacuated themselves, the government still remained silent. After the third Japanese raid on Townsville, Mayor Gill vainly begged the Prime Minister to "utilize" his "influence" to preserve what was left of "normal life" in the city by preventing the wholesale evacuation which was "believed" to be "imminent".[26] The compulsory evacuation of Townsville would mean "the dislocation of all services now rendered by civilians to the whole population extending into the Gulf and the Northern Territory which was dependent on Townsville for its existence".[27]

The main cause of official irresolution over the question of evacuation was that "urgent military need" seemed likely to require the sort of mass abandonment of homes that a govern-

ment of civilians instinctively opposed. Military authorities in Townsville, for instance, wanted the evacuation of the city because the influx of soldiers had made it "congested and overpopulated", and civilian life was "interfering with the military control".[28] As early as May 1942 the commander of the First Australian Army had sought the compulsory evacuation from Townsville of "at least another 10 000 people" whom it was proposed to relocate in southern Queensland in the homes of people living between Southport and Redcliffe.[29] When the Army Minister, Frank Forde, visited Townsville early in 1942, he admitted to one local resident that "the prospect of an evacuation" arose from the "severe" pressure being exerted on the federal government by military authorities.[30] To civilians remaining in Townsville the threatened expulsion from their homes would be "a grave blunder, a serious injustice, even a tragedy".[31] The fact that evacuation did not in the end come about was not the result of any purposeful intervention by the national government: it was merely that the Commander-in-Chief decided that "the present strategical situation" for the time being did not justify evacuation and the federal government gratefully acquiesced.[32]

Canberra did not finally formulate its policy on evacuation until September 1942, seven months after its initial consideration at a conference of state premiers on 4 February 1942, by which time, of course, the flood tide of war had receded from Australian shores and most evacuees had returned to their homes. Wholesale evacuation was belatedly pronounced "not feasible" and "undesirable", both in the interests of the people themselves and the fighting forces.[33] The people could not be guaranteed adequate accommodation nor even "life's necessities" unless they remained in their homes; moreover, evacuation could not be countenanced on the grounds of "the interference with the production of war equipment" which it would entail. Only the limited evacuation of young children "from areas contiguous to likely targets for bombing or shelling" was permissible, though even then "only when the occasion arises"; otherwise, the people had to be educated by propaganda to remain in their homes and to establish a force capable of checking the possible spread of panic. Australia's successful defence "presupposed" that the morale of the people would remain firm.[34]

The spontaneous and voluntary evacuation of north Queensland immediately after Pearl Harbor was not the only indication that the "morale" of the people had in fact already

plunged to a nadir of despondency that boded ill for the successful prosecution of a protracted war. There were hysterical outbursts against "aliens"—the settlers of Italian descent who formed such a large component of the regional population—who, whether naturalized or unnaturalized, suddenly found themselves subjected to an organized campaign of vilification, denunciation and internment.

The ripples of hatred even reached Canberra where, on 19 June 1942, War Cabinet felt constrained to consider the "trouble" that had arisen in regard to the employment of Italians on the north Queensland cane-fields.[35] In Tully, north of Townsville, an "Empire Protestant Defence League" had been formed by a prominent member of the Protestant Labor Party, Ernest Henry Malin, to foment disaffection among employees in the sugar industry and specifically to counsel "Britishers" not to work alongside Italians.[36] Xenophobia took the form of concerted efforts by unionists to force Italian workers out of the sugar industry, causing army headquarters in Brisbane (Northern Command) to express disquiet that "there was trouble in this direction everywhere".[37] Fortunately for the Italians, considerations of military security were found to clash with the persecution of aliens: such actions "endangered rather than assisted" the safety of the Commonwealth because they antagonized people "who would otherwise be at least neutral in their attitude, or, by depriving them of their occupations, make them particularly susceptible to subversive influences".[38] On military advice, War Cabinet therefore decided that preference in employment should be granted to all British subjects, naturalized as well as British-born,[39] though unnaturalized Italians would not be given employment to the exclusion of British subjects. Indeed, beyond expressing the pious hope that "our people will not deny friendly aliens the right of employment and the ordinary privileges of our social life", War Cabinet decided that nothing further need be done for the protection of friendly aliens.[40]

On one occasion, Townsville's Deputy Mayor, Tom Aikens, convened a public meeting in the Theatre Royal in an attempt to discredit some of the "incredible" stories in circulation concerning the "disloyalty" of the Italian population. "I had two of Townsville's most prominent businessmen come to see me and complain that one fellow was out in Ross Creek in a rowing boat sending morse code messages to Japanese submarines off the coast. When I said, 'Oh, really, has he got dry batteries; he must have some power to transmit,' they merely stared at

me blankly and replied, 'he must have something; he's out there tapping away'!" By the time of the actual air raids on Townsville, vague accusations of "disloyalty" had burgeoned into positive allegations of active espionage: an official report on the second raid alluded to the prevalence of "rumours" that "flares and signal lights" had illuminated the raider's approach.[41] To Aikens, the continuing internment of aliens and of naturalized British subjects "with an anti-British history" seemed the "most putrid" scandal associated with the war.[42]

Tom was an oddity among his mates in exhibiting much less animus towards foreigners that was usual for a working man. As a public figure he sometimes paid lip-service to community feelings about "greedy, cheeky and rapacious Greeks and Chinese" who were ubiquitous in the north's towns, but his barbs were always a good deal less than vicious and never aimed at the Italian residents in the countryside. On the other hand, both official and unofficial pronouncements by Labor men regularly advocated "drastic measures" to prevent the settlement of southern Europeans anywhere in the north. As Deputy Mayor, Tom once exposed the shady activities of a Member of Parliament whose exploitation of the families of Italian internees would have made Al Capone green with envy. Explained Tom, "He would get inside information from a contact in the Internment Appeals' Tribunal that, say, Luigi Macaroni was going to be released on 30th April. On 1st April he would rush over and see Macaroni's family—preferably the wife or the mother—and say, 'I have made representations to the tribunal for Luigi's release, which cost me £200 to brief counsel. If he is released soon, all I ask is that you reimburse me for those out-of-pocket expenses. Of course, if he is not released, you don't owe me a thing.' Naturally, they would say, 'Yes, of course we pay you,' and more than likely give him a handsome bonus into the bargain."[43] Aikens always remembered the fraud as "the most contemptible stunt" he ever saw a parliamentarian perform.

General Milford's gloomy assessment of Townsville's defence capability early in June was hardly calculated to dissipate the jumpy suspicions and nervous anxiety of her citizens. At the beginning of 1942 Colonel Frank North, Aikens' sometime nemesis on the City Council,[44] commanded a "Garrison Battalion" consisting of a handful of regulars who manned rifle pits around the perimeter of Castle Hill. A Volunteer Defence Corps trained with jam tins full of sand and rifles made of wood. When Tom Aikens was sent to Canberra as the city's envoy to plead

for the relief of Townsville, he used a characteristic method of impressing upon Ministers the seriousness of the situation. He told them the story, which later swept Townsville faster than a guinea-grass fire, of a VDC sentry who timorously challenged a stranger approaching one of the defence installations: "Halt," said the sentry, nervously raising his broomstick, "give the pass word or I'll fill you full of bloody white ants."[45]

But there was scant ground for even sardonic optimism of that kind. When the Acting Secretary of the Department of Home Security, A.W. Welch, visited Townsville for five days (10–15 June 1942) to check on the accuracy of General Milford's report, he could only confirm the GOC's worst fears. The twelve electrically operated sirens in the city were "insufficient"; there was no street lighting; provisions for fire-fighting were "inadequate"; the water supply was "strained"; the mobility of ARP wardens was "doubtful" because of the shortage of tubes and tyres for their bicycles; the sewerage system was "vulnerable"; there was "no satisfactory response" to his inquiry "as to who would be responsible in the event of a raid for the co-ordination of civil defence services or for any special measures required"; there was "no arrangement for the essential services to be represented at the Control Room"; the central Control Room itself, which was set up in the Police Station, "did not appear adequate"; no authority in Townsville, not even the GOC himself, had the power to require a blackout; the press in Townsville was "not very helpful". Only the shelter facilities—15 of the pill-box type in the business part of the town, 147 four-man slit trenches in the main street, and some 50 twenty-man covered trenches in the various parks and along the bus routes—appeared "reasonably satisfactory".[46] On the occasion of the first raid, administrative chaos of the kind reported by Welch left the harbour installations, undoubtedly the prime target of the Japanese attack, a fairyland of twinkling lights. "Apparently some difficulty was experienced," he drily reported, "in ascertaining the location of the switches and determining who was responsible for the switching off of the lights. It is understood that finally the lights were either smashed or shot off by the American Army."[47]

Indeed the "calm" pervading Townsville during the actual raids proved to be no more than a shocked lull in an uninterrupted process of deteriorating morale which the preceding months had unfolded. In particular, Australian and American troops began to arrive in the city virtually from the moment the civilian exodus began, and, after a brief interlude of comfort

and reassurance provided by the flexing of military muscle, a whole host of new problems created by military preponderance soon made Townsvilleans sigh for a return of the old and much less tangible fears of military under-presence. The military build-up lifted Townsville's population to an eventual peak of about 90 000 by the middle of 1943; soldiers outnumbered civilians by almost three to one.[48]

The demands of the armed services coupled with a dearth of civilian manpower brought widespread inconvenience and embarrassment through the sudden disappearance of many basic commodities.[49] Such shortages, of course, were common to all nations at war and to the whole of Australia, but nowhere in Australia was the disparity in numbers between soldiers and civilians so great as in Townsville. The privations of her citizens were consequently more real. Indeed this was not only in the opinion of Townsvilleans themselves. At a public meeting in July 1944, Professor Copland, one of the federal government's leading academic advisers, admitted that north Queensland had "suffered more disabilities during the war than probably any other part of the Commonwealth".[50]

Large numbers of householders were completely deprived of supplies of ice and milk, the two "most serious" shortages;[51] tinned and dried fruits, biscuits, alcohol, and especially fresh fruit and vegetables were scarce and exorbitantly expensive. All fruit and vegetables arriving in Townsville, usually from markets over 1500 km away in the south, were distributed either through local wholesalers or a military "Committee of Directions". The latter body attempted to indent all army requirements but frequently requisitioned from town wholesale merchants if military supplies fell short. There were no specific quota allocations to civilians nor indeed any military consideration of the townspeople's specific needs.[52] Fruit became even more of a rarity than vegetables because of the individual purchases of soldiers on leave in town, with the result that "the ordinary householder and his children" were forced to go without.[53] Profiteering was also rife. Early in 1943 watermelons fetched £1 each in Cairns and Townsville; tropical pineapples and pawpaws cost more than they did in Sydney.[54] Persistent shortages eventually tried the patience of Townsvilleans who became "fed up" with the "raw deal and shabby treatment extended to the people of this city".[55] When beer quotas not only failed to improve but actually fell after 1 August 1944, the Townsville Trades and Labour Council contemplated, threatened

and finally held a one-day strike to call attention to the "unrest" among the people of Townsville.[56]

No preparations had been made for the accommodation of any considerable number of troops in Townsville, and the military simply acquired (whether by official impressment or private treaty) large numbers of private houses as well as hotels, cinemas, public halls and schools.[57] Early in 1943, 177 private residences had been taken over.[58] Hotel accommodation was at a premium; parks and railway waiting-rooms served as popular if uncomfortable alternatives. Manpower problems forced most of the remaining hotels to close their kitchens and dining-rooms. The guest who had been fortunate enough to find a hotel bed usually ended up at the tail of a long queue into a city café already packed with servicemen. Although the Comforts Fund and other canteens served men in uniform with excellent meals at 1/6d, many preferred to eat at a higher price in a city restaurant. There was a similar situation in milk-bars where, to some observers, the presence of so many soldiers seemed "extraordinary". In the canteens a man in uniform could buy a malted milk "containing pasteurized milk" for 4d, while in cafés the price ranged from 6d to 2s. "The most common price," noted one visitor from the south, "appears to be 9d or 1/–, depending on the country of origin of the soldier, the temper of the attendant, and the supply of milk."[59]

Even when the military population had passed its peak, the housing situation showed no signs of improvement: 170 dwellings were still occupied by the military in 1944.[60] By then, Townsville's shortage of housing, "serious" even before the arrival of the troops, had become "pressing" and "acute".[61] Curiously, the acquisition of premises by private treaty provoked just as much citizen ire as peremptory impressment. Perhaps this was sometimes warranted, as when one incensed burgher wrote to his member of parliament about military pressure on home-owners: "I might say that during the past couple of days since the raids have been on, approaches are being made to people owning decent homes here, that they be leased to American officers with rental no object; and the statement is being made to the owners of these homes that it would be wise for them to take advantage of such offers, as plans are in hand by the Australian military authorities for the evacuation of Townsville and no rental return will be made for them. . . ."[62] For the most part, however, the opprobrium incurred by the armed forces was not only unjustified but cynically dispensed: it was a "common habit" of property owners leasing premises

"to represent to the citizens that they have been forced out of business" whereas in fact the army contracts had been voluntarily solicited, eagerly entered into and lucratively discharged.[63]

There was the case of the Queen's Hotel, for example. The hotel was a roomy, solid structure of brick, with balconies and verandahs pleasantly decorated by elaborate Victorian balustrades. It was Townsville's biggest and plushest hotel, commanding a superb site on the Strand where the wind blew fresh off the sea, whipping at the fronds of palms and the branches of gnarled banyans, before sweeping across the wide street to the pretentious but somehow attractive edifice—domed, pillared and cupolaed. The owners of the Queen's had their cake and ate it too. They agreed of their own free will to let the residential portion of the hotel to the United States forces at a rental of £50 per day, while still retaining the hotel's principal money-spinner, the bar trade.[64]

The citizens' growing realization that, with or without the armed forces, Townsville was "in a sad way",[65] the feeling of being caught between Scylla and Charybdis, was only strengthened by the strains which an exigent military placed on the city's public utilities. Water was the main problem. How could a huge transient population be educated to the necessity of conserving a deficient and rigorously rationed supply?[66] The Townsville City Council became so concerned with wastage that it maintained inspection patrols on the large military encampments ringing the city, such as that at Armstrong's Paddock.[67] Tom Aikens made the occasional, unscheduled visit himself: "The soldiers, not being used to water restrictions, would clean their clothes by throwing them down on the floor and turning the showers on them; every shower would be turned on, with a heap of dirty clothes on the ablutions' floor."[68] Indeed, Townsville's water shortage was a problem of such sheer physical magnitude and public emotional entanglement that the full story of various Council's efforts to solve it was assuming Galsworthian dimensions.[69] Nor were the commercial laundries any salve to the citizens' sartorial seaminess; soon after their arrival American troops took over the Townsville Steam Laundry, the only enterprise capable of handling large quantities of linen, and military priorities placed the civilian last. One hotel proprietor even feared that a military threat of refusal to accept his laundry was being used as a weapon to make him surrender all his accommodation to the forces.[70]

But of all the public utilities which failed to function satisfactorily, at least from the citizens' point of view, none was

Domed, pillared and cupolaed. The Queen's Hotel on the Strand. Photo by courtesy of the *Townsville Daily Bulletin*.

more annoying or demoralizing than the practical impossibility of communicating or conversing by telephone. It was "no uncommon experience for a telephone caller to wait up to half an hour before raising the exchange; one man watched his house burn to the ground while he vainly tried to ring the fire station from a neighbour's house."[71]

Unable to obtain many basic commodities; unable to phone his friends or even call for assistance in any emergency; unable to contact his relatives outside the city because of a military embargo on all civilian long-distance telephone calls;[72] sequestered at night in his blacked-out home "whilst wharves and prisoner-of-war camps are brilliantly illuminated"; unable to visit his friends or go to the pictures after dark because of the "disorderly elements among the troops" who roamed the streets after nightfall "in hundreds";[73] unable to attend other entertainments because most of the seats were occupied by troops;[74] unable even to drown his sorrows in the hotel bars which opened for only an hour or two before lunch, the Townsvillean could not help but give in to a rising sense of isolation, irritation and abandonment. Morale in fact plummeted so low that in January 1943, the national government appointed two academic investigators, a physiologist and an anthropologist, to examine the causes and cures of civilian disaffection in north Queensland.[75] According to their report, it was "by no means certain" how the civilians would react to a protracted war effort, so "resentful" were they of their treatment. "Should their complaints remain unheard and the legitimate grievances unadjusted, they may well prove easy dupes for enemy propaganda. A refusal to co-operate with the Services could easily follow, together with opposition to any Government which aimed at continuing the war."[76] Insurrection in time of war by a section of the Australian civilian population? These were pretty dire apprehensions.

The year 1942 was not only Townsville's "darkest hour"; it was Tom Aikens' as well. He had never been so inconspicuous before; nor would he ever be again. There were occasional public appearances as Deputy Mayor, but Tom was hamstrung by his banishment from the ALP. He had not yet made up his mind, moreover, how to grapple with himself, let alone the city's problems of military occupation. He was politically ineffectual. However, his reconciliation with the Hermit Park branch over Christmas 1942 and New Year 1943 proved his own as well as Townsville's salvation. He offered his leadership, and the people of Townsville gratefully accepted it. Tom and Townsville together pulled themselves together, shrugging off their self-pity,

reasserting their self-respect, conquering their isolation and withdrawal. They seemed to need each other, and soon Townsville lost the aspect of a fortress under siege.

10

"Committee of Public Safety"

Cairns, the northernmost terminus of the trunk railway line from Brisbane, more than 1600 km away, is a town of wide streets lined with wooden houses on high stilts. Big warehouses near the wharves are filled with grain, timber, sugar and tobacco, and in the warm air the aroma of these products blends with that of the rain-forest on the overhanging ranges. There is something about this town that recalls colonial towns in Britain's old empire of the Far East: arcades, palms and poincianas, glaring streets and inky shadows, sturdy indigenes, women in tropical white and men in shorts and topees.

Between Cairns and Townsville, the train passes through country of lush fertility until it reaches the dry savannah about three hours' run north of Townsville. The views grow increasingly spectacular. At Tully, one of the wettest places in the world, swamps reflect pale paperbarks, pandanus, and elegant, water-loving Queen of Sheba palms. At Cardwell, the railway line runs close to the sea, which is a pellucid blue in the shelter of the reef. Here the mountains look oppressively close. A little way up the gorges, the heavy trees bear orchids and vines. To the north Queenslander there is a familiar sense of unchanging dampness and growth; of trees with stinging heart-shaped leaves, the mere touch of which can set a horse galloping madly or make a dog howl all night; of the epiphytic fig, which lodges in any convenient host and sends down impenetrable curtains of aerial roots, enveloping the surrounding trees and finally strangling not only them but the host as well. Further south into the valley of the Herbert, the creeks, dark with rich soil, harbour barramundi and, not so long ago, crocodile. Tattered banana fronds and the glossy leaves of mango trees glorify the small stations. In Ingham, rain-trees spread their perfect canopies over the wide streets, their tiny leaves absorbing humidity during the day and, at night, showering dew upon the

ground. It was all country that Tom Aikens knew like the palm of his hand.

One of the most sparkling facets of the Tom Aikens' charisma which Townsvilleans found so compelling was a sort of roistering and rambunctious panache with which he set about almost everything. He even drove his trains with an eye-catching flair. Once, early in 1943, he was working the loco of the old Sunshine Express between Cairns and Townsville when it broke the knuckle joint of its trailing rod just outside Ingham. It was not only one of the most uncommon of breakdowns but also one of the most awkward, because the tail end of the engine had to be jacked up before repairs could proceed. Now it just so happened that all the crank-pin nuts securing the trailing rods of C17 locomotives unscrewed towards the front of the engine, such that on one side they unscrewed clockwise and on the other side anti-clockwise. Rare as the accident was—and this was in fact the first time it had ever happened to Aikens—he had not forgotten this esoteric little detail and yanked the ring spanner in the correct, clockwise direction on the right side of the engine. But it would not yield. Tom swore and sweated in front of the curious audience of passengers who had got out of the carriages to see what was wrong. One of the spectators, the inevitable smart alec, offered himself as the spokesman of a crowd that was beginning to despair of ever reaching their destination. "Try turning it the other way, yer mug!" and the tone of scornful derision was all Aikens needed to prod him into sudden resolution, for this was no man to suffer humiliation meekly. Instinctively reacting in a way which would not merely save his own face but also make the know-all lose his (and, even more, which would simply and unambiguously contrast his own superior intelligence with the other's cretinous stupidity), Tom packed a mass of oily waste on to the nut and put a match to it. Instantly and spectacularly the grease on the engine frame and wheels was in flames, whereupon Tom's critic became noisily excited: "We've got a madman driving the train," he said, marshalling all his reserves of sarcasm, "he couldn't get a nut off because he was turning it the wrong way, now he's trying to burn the whole bloody engine!" Tom stood back and surveyed the flames with professional disinterest—indeed, looking like nothing so much as a fireman performing the most elementary of drills, which of course he was, for there were alternative (and approved) methods of removing stubborn nuts, and the only part of a C17 locomotive that would keep on burning was the wooden lagging inside the boiler casing where the flames would never

A C17 crossing the Burdekin. Photo by courtesy of the *Townsville Daily Bulletin*.

reach. Then, as soon as the heat had done its job, and working now with a speed and precision which he had never before excelled, he took off the nut, removed the trailing rods from both sides, stacked them on the outside footplate, jacked down the engine and clambered back on to the cab footplate. The crowd roared their appreciation and, when the train moved off, Tom blew an acknowledging and definitive toot-toot.[1]

Tom's never-say-die vivacity, once he had made the decision to curb his drinking, had a tonic effect on the frayed nerves of Townsville citizens. Indeed, the fact that their morale did not completely disintegrate under the incubus of military occupation (though it came perilously close to doing so) was in large measure due to the resourcefulness and leadership of the municipal fathers. Far from being intimidated by the military or succumbing, as for a time in 1942 it appeared that they were, to the sheer, staggering enormity of totally unfamiliar problems, they took up the challenge in a vigilant and even imaginative way.

In fact, Tom Aikens took up the challenge as early as February 1942 when he called a public meeting in the Town Hall "to counteract distrust, defeatism and panic".[2] After forming a "Help Australia Committee" (the name first mooted was "Help Ourselves Committee", but that seemed too blatant), it was decided to appeal to the Council to send Mayor Gill to Canberra with a public plea for deliverance. As Tom put it to the meeting, "there appeared to be some panic, and silly rumours had gained credence. There was also a looseness of thinking and looseness of talking . . . a spirit of defeatism in Townsville."[3]

At a special meeting of the Council two days later, the Mayor saw it as his "bounden duty" to remain in Townsville and Aikens was sent instead.[4] For three nights and three days he sat up in compartments of the Queensland and New South Wales Governments' railways, in carriages panelled in dark, glossy wood, with Victorian-looking upholstery, and big sepia photographs of country scenes set into panels above the seats. Tom had plenty of time to admire the view from the windows, which was at once monotonous and varied, a tapestry consisting largely of eucalyptus trees, their bark dark or pearly white, their leaves grey-green and drooping. This tapestry had an elusive delicacy, derived from the intricate convolutions of trunks and branches, from the smoke-like blue touching certain species of gum leaves, from the occasional gold of a species of early-flowering mimosa, and from the passing flash of creek water. Of course, that was when the view was not obscured by clouds of billowing black

smoke from the engine, which the open windows sucked in, smothering passengers and compartments with a hard, dirty grit. Other aspects of the trip more familiar to Tom were the jolting of the train, the stops at small stations where tubs of croton shrubs stood under wooden overhangs and where the aroma of old paper files wafted from the ticket office. At the longer stops, there would be restaurants, with starched white serviettes folded into the glasses on the tables; at the shorter stops were tea-rooms, serving corned beef sandwiches, meat pies and gargantuan sausage-rolls.

In Canberra, Tom made a point of importuning every Minister with elaborate tales of impending doom and destruction in the north. "I realized that if you're scrupulously honest in politics you're not going to get very far. It is not a question of telling lies but of enhancing an argument a little with a little bit of exaggeration and hyperbole—as long as you don't get right away from the truth, for you must have that grain of truth on which to build your edifice of assumption."[5] Not that hyperbole was much needed in this case. It was the time when north Queenslanders were demanding the internment of "fascists"; when Townsville's Volunteer Defence Corps of some three hundred unarmed men was practically all that stood between north Queensland shores and a Japanese invasion; when rumours of sabotage swept the city; when police awakened people late at night and in the early hours of the morning, "causing the residents to believe that they were on the eve of an evacuation".[6] It was pretty cold comfort to the citizens of Townsville to learn from Tom, on his return, that although the north lay undefended the government in Canberra wanted them to remain where they were "as had occurred in Russia, because the people left behind the enemy lines were the ones who were contributing most to the Nazi defeat".[7] Nevertheless, Tom had prevailed upon the government to give some thought, however perfunctory, to the plight of Townsville, and there were signs that his mission had not been wholly futile. After all, had not the issue of rifles to the VDC now begun?[8]

By the end of 1942, however, the north Queenslander, burdened by excessive numbers of troops and ever more stringent shortages, had becomed fixed in his conviction that the federal government was mostly to blame for his sorry lot. He argued that civilian interests ought to have been given some measure of protection and that, in its failure to provide this, Canberra had been guilty of gross negligence and dereliction of duty.[9]

Again, the Townsville City Council stepped in to fill the void

of leadership. On 9 November 1942 (a watershed in Tom's life, just after the first approach had been made to him to rejoin the Hermit Park branch), Aikens was elected chairman of a "Special Committee" set up by the Council "to consider matters arising out of the war situation".[10] Within a month the Special Committee had ordered an investigation into the shortage of ice; recommended that the Price Fixing Commissioners fix the price of ice and bread; demanded that children receive priority quotas of milk; recommended that the Minister for War Organization of Industry institute a zoning system in Townsville for the distribution of meat, milk, ice and bread; instigated legal action against the "rack" selling of essential goods (such as the refusal to sell a tube, unless the customer also purchased a tyre); ordered an investigation into the shortage of wood fuel; called for controls on the sale and distribution of fruit and vegetables; and recommended the establishment of a Legal Aid Department "for the guidance of citizens as to their main rights as tenants under the Landlord and Tenants Regulations".[11] Most of the recommendations were presently endorsed by the Prime Minister's Committee on National Morale;[12] not only that, they were promptly implemented by the Townsville City Council.[13]

The pessimism of north Queenslanders at about the time that Aikens' regained power (towards the end of 1942), which the Prime Minister's commissioners thought defeatist, if not mutinous, was attributable not merely to the material deprivations following in the wake of military occupation but also to the proliferation of unfamiliar social problems with which they increasingly felt unable to cope. These were the problems of prostitution, venereal disease, and pugnacity and violence among the garrison troops, especially arising out of the real and imagined differences between Australian and American national traits. Indeed "the most serious source of civilian distrust" was brawling between Australian and American servicemen, leading to the taking of sides by citizens, usually their own side, or to their branding all servicemen as "barbarians".[14]

On the Australian side, the diggers' truculence towards Americans stemmed mainly from the pampered softness, amounting even to cowardice, which GIs supposedly exhibited, or from simple envy of his supposed sexual prowess, his high pay, free spending and superior military appurtenances. The conduct of soldiers towards girls was the main source of criticism. Civilians had very definite views on the proper behaviour between the sexes; any form of transgression was looked upon with disfavour. The free association between members of the American forces

and Australian girls therefore gave rise to much adverse comment. To one local resident, "it is comforting to have so many of the U.S.A. forces here, without them we would undoubtedly be in a sad way, but their manner of living is in very sharp contrast to the conditions under which our own military men are existing." To another, perhaps more objective, outsider, "the woman is usually absolved, blame being attributed to either the subtlety or the crudity of the American, depending on the inclination of the observer."[15]

On the American side, peevish GIs tended to magnify the discomforts of life in a new land; in their eagerness to spend their money, they invited the overcharge of waiters, landlords, florists and taxi-drivers, who called their profits "Yankee cream". To one American observer, "high pay and free spending [among] our men yielded no more than the usual toll of inflation in civilian circles, envy in military ones." But most GIs bore a deeper grudge against overcharging and would readily have endorsed the sentiments of another expeditionary force member long ago: "They fleece us piteously; the price of everything is exorbitant; in all dealings that we have with them they treat us more like enemies than friends." Those words were written in 1782 by Count Fersen, staff officer to Lafayette, after a winter among the Yankees. It was perhaps even more ironic that the GI's reputation in Australia as that of a stalwart and efficient soldier on the whole, but with too much money and a far too devastating way with the girls, was about exactly that gained in 1915–19 by the ANZACs in England.[16]

Veterans were not nearly so conspicuous in street fighting as those who had not yet faced the enemy. The men of Australia's Ninth Division, for example, long absent in the deserts of North Africa, returned to Australia "breathing fire and brimstone", convinced by German propaganda that the Yanks had stolen their wives and sweethearts.[17] When they landed in Sydney, American soldiers were instructed to keep to their quarters and the windows of the American Centre were boarded up; but not a single incident occurred.[18] Similarly, diggers in transit through Townsville on their way home from New Guinea showed little inclination for argument. While it is true that there was not much fraternization between Australian and American veterans, each was ready with "unsolicited testimonials for the heroism and fighting ability" of the other.[19] On the other hand, many ugly encounters undoubtedly took place between rear-echelon troops—to Townsvilleans, the holders of the "Flinders Street Star"—and it was these who tended to repeat with greatest gusto

the stories of American cowardice.[20] Not even stifling censorship, occasionally of the sort of obscurantist intensity which led to the banning throughout Queensland of all broadcasts of Boccherini's *Minuet* and Vienne's *Tick Tock Entr'acte*[21], could conceal from civilians the frequent manifestations of street "disturbances" which bore an "inter-allied aspect" and which showed up neither side "in a very attractive light", but least of all the Australians.[22] Probably the most infamous of these "disturbances" was the so-called Battle of Creek Street (November 1942) when Australians and Americans tangled outside the American canteen in Creek Street, Brisbane, but there were plenty of similar, if lesser, conflicts in Townsville.

One evening Tom was pedalling back home when he noticed a ragged and shifting circle of soldiers and civilians behind the Causeway Hotel. At the centre of the confusion eight American military police flourished their .45 pistols, and several Australians lay writhing on the ground, one of whom had been clubbed into insensibility, and another shot through the foot. Tom heaved his massive, 160 kg frame off the frail, rusting bike and began to harangue the MPs, his arms wildly flailing the air. "What the bloody hell do you think you're doing? Is this how you behave in the streets of America? I'll have you know I'm the Deputy Mayor of this town and your superiors are going to hear about this. Before I'm finished with you you'll be squealing for mercy like cut swine." Whether it was the sudden vision of official retribution, the physical menace of Tom's bulking presence, or merely surprise at the strident fearlessness of the Deputy Mayor's earthy invective, the MPs retreated in confusion with Tom on his bicycle in hot pursuit. He did not stop until he arrived back at the Town Hall and, with customary impetuosity, fired off irate telegrams to the Minister for the Army and the American Commander-in-Chief. It may have been coincidental, but of course Tom liked to think that it was not, that after his personal intervention in the incident behind the Causeway the American authorities became "perfect models of co-operation".[23]

If seasoned diggers on the whole treated stories of their loved ones' infidelity with the aloofness they usually deserved, their civilian counterparts were decidedly less inclined to forgive innumerable other instances of what seemed to them rampant immorality. In Townsville there was a "marked" increase in the incidence of venereal disease; it was also well known that the bordellos behind the Causeway Hotel were veritable mints for their resourceful entrepreneurs, one girl having accumulated

The Seaview. "Drunken debauches" and "depraved orgies". Photo by courtesy of the *Townsville Daily Bulletin.*

£3800 in her savings' bank account over a period of twelve months.[24] What the evidence of their own eyes did not confirm, some citizens were prone to leave to the embellishment of a prurient imagination. The Officers' Club in the Seaview Hotel, notwithstanding a two-hour limit on its bar trading hours, was commonly believed to be little more than a brothel, the scene of "drunken debauches" and "depraved orgies". On one occasion, so a popular story went, forty-three girls were forcibly removed from officers' beds and left to cool off in the city gaol;[25] on another, an entire railway carriage filled with pregnant WAAAFs was supposed to have been surreptitiously sent south, with the legend "Return when empty" scored in chalk on the side.[26] In fact, the only evidence of bacchanalian revelries at the Seaview consisted in the sounds of laughter and singing which emanated from the premises each night; and in six or seven months spanning the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943 only one WAAAF had become pregnant.[27] Tom Aikens, with his unfailing instinct for sensing a mood, cynically blowing it up into larger-than-lifesize proportions, articulating it and thereby assisting it to coagulate, swore just as balefully that "soldiers were now pushing the girls whom they had impregnated

under Army trucks to save themselves the expense of an illegal operation".[28] That grisly image was of course a product of Tom's sometimes bloated imagination, true only to the extent that it exaggerated a single instance which, whether actual or not, was widely believed to have occurred. And that was precisely the point: the jumpiness of civilians, the fairy-tales of military rambunctiousness and lawlessness, the gnawing fears and sporadic hysterical outbursts, were all symptoms rather than causes of a deep-seated community malaise. As the Prime Minister's expert investigators put it: "We suggest that the eagerness with which charges are repeated may be an indication that they are more the excuse than the reason for irritation."[29]

One other particularly unsettling source of civilian uneasiness, which often held the attention of the Special Committee, was the presence of large numbers of American Negro troops in and around Townsville. What clearly impressed many Australians who saw the Negro was his magnificent physique, but they also saw him handling machinery, performing unusual tasks and at times working with or even directing the activities of whites.[30] This had the effect of dislodging the citizens' stereotype of the black man as a primitive sub-human who was irredeemably lazy, shiftless, dissolute, and devoid of normal human motivations. Indeed the shock to Australians of the arrival of Negroes on their shores was plainly schizophrenic. On the one hand, some residents of north Queensland were prepared to accept him for what he was, though admittedly with condescending surprise: "I like some of the black Americans, the Negroes, those I have met further inland, seemed real people."[31] On the other hand, Australian officialdom agreed "reluctantly" to accept Negro soldiers, and then only on the condition that they would be withdrawn "at the end of the Australian emergency".[32] When one federal Minister heard that Negro troops were actually being permitted to patronize brothels in Brisbane and Townsville, and that the prostitutes were white Australian girls, he recoiled in horror at the very thought: "This seems to me to be something so outrageous to Australian psychology that it is likely to become the gravest possible menace to Australia's war effort. . . . Perhaps nothing embittered the German people more and provided such a fertile field of exploitation by Hitler in the early days of the rise of National Socialism, than the compelling of the German people to provide white German women to satisfy the lust of American Negroes."[33] In deference to such sensitivities, the American Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Theatre, General MacArthur, advised the Australian govern-

ment that he "respected" Australia's racial views and would assign Negroes to bases "far from urban centres".[34]

Townsville, of course, was just such a base "far from urban centres", and most of the early arrivals of American troops in the city were indeed Negroes. By mid-1942 there were 6394 Negro GIs in Australia (representing nearly 40 per cent of all U.S. black troops stationed overseas at the time),[35] most of whom finished up in north Queensland where they laboured for Australians and built airstrips at places like Woodstock and Giru. The most important concentration of Negroes was at Mount Isa which was about as far "from urban centres" as it would have been possible to go in the whole of Australia. Most of the Negro labour battalions had to use hand-tools, build wheelbarrows out of boxes, clear the scrub with machetes and hire equipment from local farmers.[36]

Woodstock and Giru, too, were certainly "far from urban centres" in the south; they were also thirty miles or so from Townsville. Apparently, not only the people of Sydney and Melbourne but also those of remote Townsville had to be protected from some nameless subversion. Even concealment in the bush was deemed inadequate insulation: Queensland newspapers were forbidden to carry either letterpress or photographs reporting coloured troops, and any reference to all to the colour of United States soldiers was ordered to be struck out.[37] The terms "negro", "black" and "coloured" were officially regarded as being "detrimental".[38]

In these circumstances of almost Siberian segregation, the wonder is that the first Negro regiments found their reception in Townsville "quite hospitable",[39] though this may have been partly because of the efforts of the Townsville City Council to accommodate their biological urge by providing land, water and lighting for "a rather large bordello" if the American authorities undertook to erect it.[40] When that particular proposal foundered, some hundreds of Negroes from a large holding encampment just outside the suburb of Wulguru demonstrated their disapproval by marching on the city "in a solid phalanx"; only the detemined intervention of military police who were armed, so one rumour went, with machine guns, finally turned them back.[41] Later, the American army evidently relented and set up several brothels for the exclusive use of Negro troops, "much to the disgust of many civilians".[42]

However, the morale of Negro troops was never good because of the appalling conditions under which they had to work, in never-ending shifts around the clock, "without making notable

progress", and amid the hot and arid desolation of the countryside south and west of Townsville.[43] "For all the work accomplished by the 91st in its first four months in Australia, it was stated to the battalion both orally and in writing that the unit might as well have stayed in the U.S.[44] These sentiments were no doubt echoed by the GIs themselves when, in August 1942, as a result of increased support provided by the influx of Australian servicemen, the last Negro units left Townsville.[45]

The Jacobinism of Hermit Park, like that of Paris, consisted of a radical idealism, tinged with socialism, which was also intensely patriotic. Certainly no other government in Australia had been more socialistic than the Greater Townsville Labour Party, and few had evinced such fervid local patriotism. In like terms, it is tempting to compare the membership and functions of Townsville's war-time Special Committee with those of the Committee of Public Safety during the French Revolution, to see the three fiery Jacobins of Townsville—Aikens, Murgatroyd and Paterson—as modern counterparts of Robespierre, Saint-Just and Couthon. Both committees set out to achieve similar ends: to win the war (or at least to make a decisive contribution to the war effort) by a determined mobilization of people and resources; and to repress civil strife and counter-revolution at home.

The Prime Minister's committee on national morale muttered darkly of the possibility of civil recrimination and disobedience in Townsville, even popular insurrection. As well, there was ideological subversion to contend with, for, just like Robespierre's Laws of Vêntose, the Special Committee's programme of "municipalizing" essential services and utilities provoked the dismay and antagonism of a section of Townsville's citizenry who were utterly opposed on ideological grounds to what they saw as the "red anting" of local government. Not all was sweetness, harmony and light among Townsville's civilian population, and there were times when the Jacobinism of Hermit Park Labour aroused the fierce resentment of the constituency of the Right.

For example, the Townsville Chamber of Commerce protested against the "wasteful expenditure" and "futility" of the Council's activities[46] For its part, the Council deplored that "a sprinkling of persons with fascist tendencies" should have monopolized the city's "national guard", the VDC;[47] it was alleged that "every officer of the VDC in Townsville had taken, at one time or another, an anti-labour political part" and that promotions in the VDC were causing "dissension" because of

such "sectional control".[48] This time the Returned Soldiers' League showed its disapproval by objecting to City Council representation at its farewells to recruits while a communist, Paterson, remained an alderman.[49] Accordingly, the draft which left to reinforce the AIF abroad one Thursday evening was enthusiastically farewelled, but not by any representative of the Townsville City Council. The President of the RSL asked the young recruits to have a parting glass with the Old Diggers and then partake of the excellent repast which was provided by the good women of Townsville. There was then community singing "until such time as the troops marched off to the Central Station amid the usual enthusiastic scenes".[50]

Dissension among civilians, however, was as nothing compared with the tension between civilians and the military, which made it all the more noteworthy when the Special Committee, at Aikens' prodding, successfully sponsored formal cooperation between the two. Indeed the only occasions on which City Council, state police, Australian and American military authorities ever acted in concert were at meetings of a Traffic Advisory Committee instigated and chaired by Aikens. The committee also served as a forum in which to air every other grievance affecting relations between the military and civilians. In 1942 and 1943 the streets of Townsville were "busier than the principal thoroughfares of Sydney and Melbourne four years ago"; on one afternoon in January 1943, 316 army trucks were counted in Flinders Street within the space of fifteen minutes.[51] Military drivers were notorious for their "carelessness and utter disregard for the safety of other users of the roads",[52] and in one two-month period fifty-seven traffic accidents resulted in thirteen fatalities.[53] The Traffic Advisory Committee took the lead in recommending amendments to the motor vehicle regulations, which included the imposition of a 40 kph speed limit within the boundaries of Townsville.[54] According to the *Bulletin,* the campaign bore good results, "despite the disregard of Townsville citizens who rode bikes at night without lights, sometimes two or three abreast, and who, in small-town fashion, paraded along Townsville's roadways in preference to the footpaths, walking in the direction of the traffic instead of against it."[55]

Thus the Townsville City Council, under the effective leadership of Tom Aikens, never once relaxed its efforts on behalf of a perplexed and often sorely tried citizenry. However, in the absence of any sustained interest on the part of the national government in dispelling the effects of isolation and occupation,

the people's spirits faltered and almost failed. At the beginning of 1943 the Prime Minister's committee on national morale wondered whether Townsvilleans still had their hearts in the military conflict. It was unable to find much ground for optimism. On the one hand, "contributions have been made to war loans . . . again, although there have been one or two very minor holdups on the waterfront, the indefatigable efforts of the railway workers have won the unbounded admiration of everyone."[56] On the other hand, civilian vexation was so great that the committee felt unable to guarantee, if the grievances of north Queenslanders continued to go unheard, that they would "still be willing to co-operate freely once the Japanese [had] been thrown out of New Guinea and their safety [was] no longer directly menaced."[57]

By the end of 1943 there were few encouraging signs that civilian demoralization had been stanched; to the contrary, a mass meeting of Townsville's citizens on the Strand listened intently to Tom Aikens' bodeful recitation of government neglect which hung over Townsville like the sword of Damocles, threatening her citizens with disaster. As late as mid-1944 north Queenslanders were still convinced that southern governments in Brisbane and Canberra were ignorant of their "total war-time experiences" and indifferent to them.[58] The chief architect and spokesman of that mood was Tom Aikens, so when Townsvilleans elected him to parliament in 1944 it was not merely to fight the "tyranny" of the QCE; it was to browbeat southerners into giving the north "a square go".

11

The Honourable Tom

Although he did not know it at the time, Aikens' celebrated Strand speech at the end of 1943 marked the zenith of his political power, though not of his political influence and prestige. The explanation for that seeming paradox lay in the fact that he presently failed in his bid for an office which he confidently expected to attain but quite unexpectedly found himself in another. The office Aikens coveted, but failed to get, was the mayoralty of Townsville.

J.S. Gill had become increasingly ineffectual and aloof as a war-time leader. To Tom, "he was a nice old fellow for civic receptions and to meet people, but when the war came he seemed to retire into a corner in a state of shock and left me and my boys to run the show." Gill still firmly believed that the British Empire would rise ever more gloriously from the ashes of war and that the chief preoccupation of Townsvilleans ought to be the awesome expectation of that splendid event.[1] Aikens, and of course not only he, treated the old man as an irrelevant relic.

> Once in 1943 I went into his office and I had never seen him so excited. He said, "Aikens, have you heard, a royal baby has been born?" "Well, Mr Mayor, you can't blame me for that." "Don't be flippant," he said, "every time I say something serious you say something facetious in return." So he got on the phone to Colonel North and said, "Colonel, do you know what they do when a royal baby is born? Don't you think we ought to fire some guns or something?" And apparently Frank North became as impatient as I was amused. He replied, "All I know about royal babies is that when I was in camp on Salisbury Plain the General's wife had one but all they fired was a second lieutenant!" That broke the poor old man's heart.[2]

Aikens could afford to be amused rather than annoyed because he and Gill had already reached a private understanding that the Mayor would retire before the 1946 local government

elections when the Deputy Mayor could expect, virtually as a matter of course, to succeed to the mayoral chair.[3] There was just no other rival in sight. As Deputy and *de facto* Mayor during the war years, chairman of the Special Committee, slayer of the ALP Goliath at the 1943 municipal election, standard-bearer of Townsville's "revolution" against government indifference and neglect, Aikens seemed to have nothing between him and the realization of his most cherished ambition, save the gentle effluxion of time. However, fate and the electors of Townsville decreed otherwise.

If, early in 1943, the QCE of the ALP had accepted the recommendation of the Deputy Premier, Ned Hanlon, that the renegade Hermit Park branch be received back into the ALP, Tom Aikens would never have offered himself as a candidate for election to parliament in the 1944 state elections. By the narrowest of margins, however, the QCE surprisingly rejected Hanlon's recommendation, whereupon the "popular front" Greater Townsville Labour Party, comprising the proscribed Hermit Park ALP and the Communist Party, entered the municipal lists against the official ALP in May 1943 and overwhelmed them.

Notwithstanding increasing bitterness between the two parties throughout 1943, the thought of challenging the ALP machine in the arena of state politics (so supreme a folly it must have seemed to anyone who did contemplate it) had so far scarcely crossed the mind of any of the Hermit Park rebels. But it did, and with a vengeance, at the beginning of 1944 when the QCE confronted the renegades with what seemed to them yet another intolerable instance of bureaucratic insensitivity and injustice. Following as it did so hard upon the "injustice" of their own recent expulsion, the Hermit Park "ALP" rose to the provocation with all the fervour of embarking on a holy war.

Jack Dash, member for the Townsville state electorate of Mundingburra since 1920, Minister for Transport in the Forgan Smith government since 1932, was defeated in the ALP pre-selection plebiscite for endorsement as the official ALP candidate at the coming state election. A ubiquitous, hard-working and well-loved figure in Townsville, he was the more highly esteemed for having freely dispensed patronage during the worst years of the Depression. "In those days," Tom later reminisced, "membership tickets for the Hermit Park ALP sold like hot cakes because Jack Dash was Minister for Transport, and the best good turn you could do for a fellow was to get him a job on the lengths as a fettler. Men would join the branch, get in touch

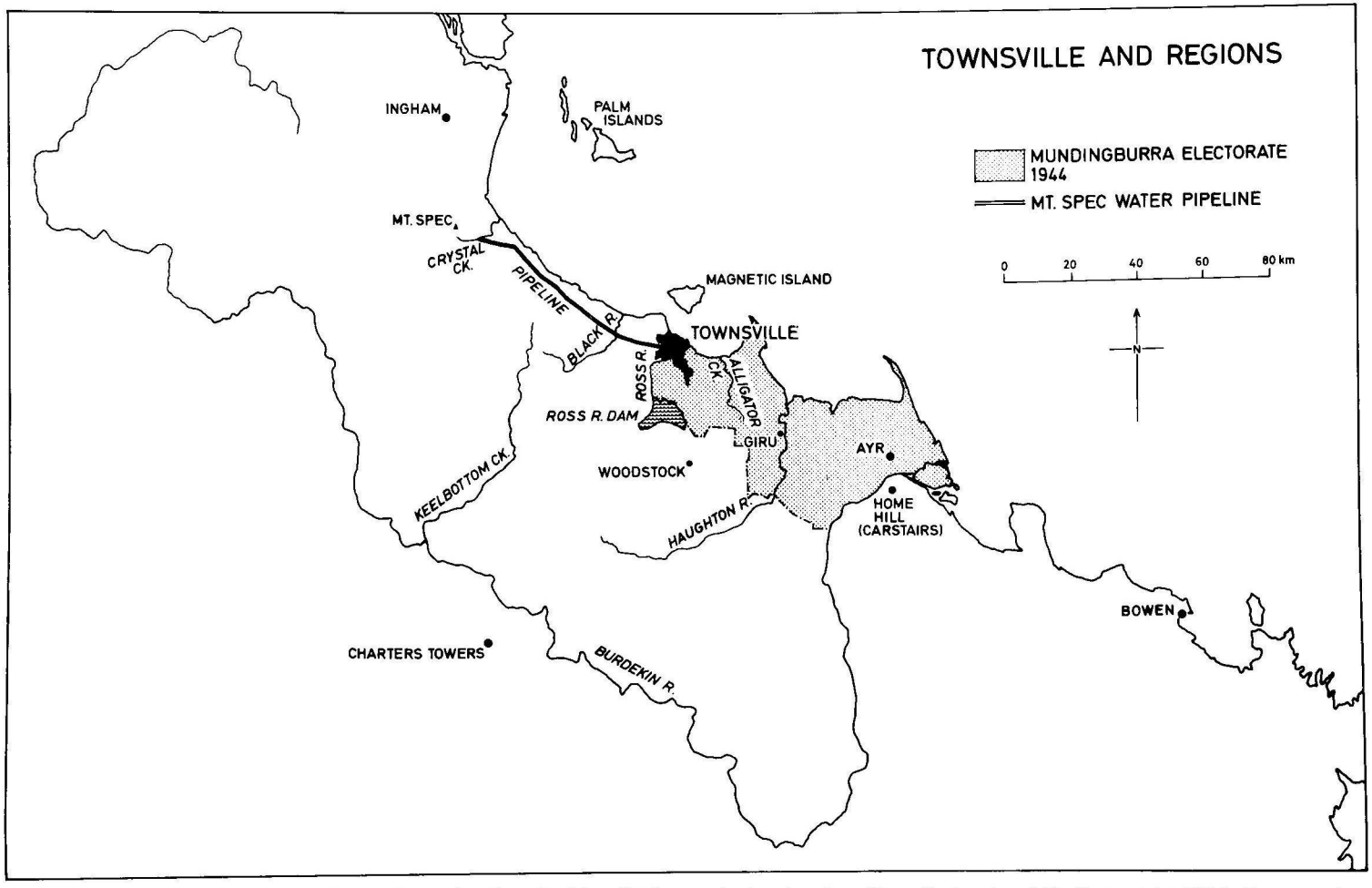
with Jack, land a job out in Boulia, or somewhere, and that was the last you would ever see of them. The Hermit Park ALP was the best employment agency in North Queensland."[4]

Also the largest branch in the Mundingburra electorate, Hermit Park had been solidly behind Dash's consistent re-election to parliament; among its members, there was still an enormous fund of sympathy towards Dash, despite the fact that in the dispute with the QCE he had finally decided to remain in the official ALP fold. Now, not only had the QCE disowned Dash, but in selecting Bill Tomlins from Ayr as its official candidate it had also pointedly snubbed Townsville. Tom recalls,

> The members of the Hermit Park ALP were irate to a man. They said the QCE had to be taught a lesson once and for all and that we would have to run our own man in Mundingburra. And then it suddenly dawned on me that I was the fellow they were thinking of. They said, "Tom, there's only one man who could win Mundingburra and that's you." "No fear, not me," I said, "I don't want to run for Mundingburra; I want to go into the Mayor's chair." But in the end I gave in.[5]

Aikens was elected a member of the Legislative Assembly in Brisbane because of his popularity as Deputy Mayor, especially during the darkest years of the war, and the Hermit Park ALP's equally popular record of municipal administration in Townsville. A sense of abandonment by both state and federal governments ran so deep in Townsville that the ordinary citizen determinedly renounced his traditional political allegiance. Confidently, but futilely, the ALP thought that all it had to do in the 1944 election campaign was to remind the citizen of that very allegiance. Most ALP campaign literature simply reminded the electors that there was "only one official ALP candidate" in each of the Townsville electorates. These were the only oblique references to Aikens' existence; otherwise, the ALP campaign simply ignored him, reminding electors of the ALP's future role in the "gigantic task" of post-war reconstruction.[6] Indeed, to the extent that the ALP recognized any threat at all, this was seen as coming not from Aikens but from the right-wing Opposition parties—the Country Party and the Queensland People's Party.[7]

For his part, Aikens took nothing for granted. He continually warned the electors against being "hoodwinked" by those who had sat passively by and done nothing during the war "but are now endeavouring to claim the credit for electioneering purposes".[8] He also spoke on practically every street corner in Townsville and Ayr. Of course the normal thing to do in those



Map of Townsville and neighbouring regions, showing the Mundingburra electorate when Tom first entered Parliament in 1944. Cartography by courtesy of Department of Geography, James Cook University of North Queensland.

days was to have formal, mostly sedate hall meetings. But Tom reckoned on the one hand, that anyone going into a hall advertised to all the world that he was more than just interested in what the speaker was saying. On the other hand, people could stand on a street corner for hours, and if anyone said to them, "What were you doing listening to that rat Aikens the other night?" they could reply, "Oh, I just happened to be walking past and heard him ranting and raving, so I thought I'd stop for a while."[9]

Of one thing Aikens was sure: that if only he could get the people to listen to him he would be able to put his message across. Moreover, he would be grateful for the support of anyone who wanted to give it, not excluding the communists. The Hermit Park ALP's opening advertisement in the campaign "requested" Communist Party members in Mundingburra to attend the first meeting. Hermit Park and communist candidates backed each other up on the hustings. Two communist candidates in the neighbouring electorates of Kennedy (J.W. Clubley) and Bowen (Fred Paterson) even fancied their chances of riding into parliament on the coat-tails of the two Hermit Park candidates, Aikens (Mundingburra) and "Pooger" O'Brien (Townsville); their campaign propaganda pointed to the joint achievements of the Hermit Park Labour and Communist Party aldermen on the Townsville City Council and exhorted a vote for all "progressive" candidates, though without identifying Clubley and Paterson as communists. Paterson, of course, was successful in Bowen and thus became the first and only communist ever to enter an Australian parliament.[10]

Aikens' confidence in the powers of his own persuasion was hardly misplaced; not even fading printer's ink dampens the fire of his oratory.

> There were more members of Parliament in Brisbane city alone than in central and northern Queensland. The northern electors had been regarded as dumb, driven cattle, to vote for the men wearing the moth-eaten mantle of the QCE. They had continued with Fascist methods until the people were tired of them. There was a trial of strength last May [the 1943 municipal election] when official Labour candidates were routed. A blow was struck for freedom, which had reverberated throughout the Commonwealth, and for the first time in the North official labour candidates lost their deposits [*applause*]. The present election was more than an ordinary contest; it was a fight for freedom in the working class movement [*applause*]. Northerners were in revolt. For years they trusted Labor, but they had been betrayed and neglected by Labor Ministers [*Hear,*

> *hear!*]. To the eternal disgrace of the State Labour Party, it abused every power conferred on it by the Curtin Government. There was the closing of schools by the State Government, and some scholars lost a year's schooling. Children were debarred from the pictures simply that the picture proprietors could charge full prices and any old price to the Yanks [*applause*]. Where was official Labour when homes were impressed? What a great outlook for North Queensland if Clubley, O'Brien, Paterson and Aikens held the balance of power in Parliament! If they returned these three [*sic*] they would drive a nail in the coffin of the Hanlon–Fallon dictatorship [*loud and sustained applause*]."[11]

Aikens won the campaign comfortably against his ALP and QPP opponents, as well as two other Independents.[12] He lambasted the candidates of the two major parties quite impartially. The ALP was a party of "rottenness, corruption and ballot faking"; the QPP was "the representatives of profiteers, racketeers, slum landlords and black-marketeers". One of the two Independents, Arthur Coburn, a respected school teacher from Ayr, later joined Tom in parliament as the member for Burdekin. Although unsuccessful on this occasion, Tom acknowledged that Coburn was "the one man who saved me. The moment he decided to run I knew that I was home and dry because he would take all, or a large slice, of the votes off Tomlins (ALP) in Ayr; and I knew that I had enough up my sleeve to beat him in Townsville."[13] If Tom entertained any doubts at all about his personal ability to conquer the unknown world of state politics without the official ALP imprimatur, he managed to conceal them behind a façade of jaunty self-confidence. He constantly referred to himself and O'Brien as the "only genuine Labour candidates" and was even brazen enough to tell the electors not to "waste" their votes on "independents" like Coburn.[14]

Even the ultra-conservative Townsville press expressed muted satisfaction with the result: "If the poll has the effect of securing a better deal for the North then it will have served us well. The powers that be in the South must realize that the resentment is very real."[15] On 20 July 1944, on the eve of his departure for Parliament House in Brisbane, Aikens handed in his resignation as Deputy Mayor of Townsville.[16]

By the time Tom took up his seat on the cross benches of the Legislative Assembly in Brisbane, the bad blood between the ALP and the Hermit Park Labour Party (as it now officially styled itself for the purposes of state politicking) had turned into venom. This occurred largely as a result of the campaign tactics which the ALP employed against Aikens during the 1944

election. Interjectors at his street-corner meetings hurled the sort of abuse that found the recipient's only Achilles' heel—his occasional but sometimes sensational benders. "The campaign was absolutely filthy. Some of the stories that circulated about me, and I suppose they did have some basis in fact, were fantastically scurrilous; but when all is said and done Bill Tomlins wasn't such a clean potato himself."[17]

Aikens there and then made two decisions: that he would never drink again, but that he would also give no quarter henceforth to his ALP opponents, closing the door on any future reconciliation. "I decided as soon as I got into parliament that I was going to cut the painter once and for all. I made that decision because all my life I have said, 'if you are going to do something, do it and don't be ambiguous about it.' "[18] So, as soon as he entered parliament, Tom gave as good as he got. He applied an old lesson that he had picked up out west: if you use Marquis of Queensberry rules in a fight and your opponent uses dog and goanna rules he'll beat you every time.[19] "Fancy the Labour Party of all parties charging anyone with intoxication, even spasmodic intoxication! As I told them at the [Hermit Park] branch, if intoxication were a sin punishable with expulsion from the ALP, then you would be able to number the members of that party on the fingers of one hand."[20]

The truth of Tom's drinking at the time was that, from about the period of his reception back into the Hermit Park branch, he had brought it under control. He then gave it up completely after entering parliament. But even during 1942, his most hazy year, the bouts were never quite as frequent nor as boozy as his ALP opponents were prone to make out. Photographs of the Deputy Mayor "lying in the gutter outside Lowth's Hotel" were supposed to be extant, but no one could be found who had ever actually seen one. Not that Tom had never been pie-eyed in that particular part of town.

One night he was in Lowth's saloon bar when Talbot Heatley walked in: "Come on Tom, you've had enough to drink, I'll drive you home." Like all protesting drunks, Tom knew that he had not had nearly enough to drink, although his Celtic sense of humour was still sufficiently sharp to see a chance of ribbing Heatley whom everyone tended to think was a bit too good to be true. In fact, the two men were friends notwithstanding that the contrast between their personalities could almost have been a caricature of that between the bluff Irishman and the upright Englishman. Tom was the type of Irish Catholic (albeit lapsed) whom Englishmen called emotional, pig-headed and a drunkard;

Heatley was even more the archetype of the Protestant Englishman whom Irishmen derided as a materialistic, moralistic, self-satisfied prig. However, the friendship between the two men was based on their more sensitive perceptions that, on the one hand, Catholics in Australia had contributed a strain of anti-materialism, wit, a liking for oratory and story-telling; and, on the other, Protestants had brought a feeling for intellectual liberty, a belief that throne, altar and marketplace could somehow all work well together.

So Talbot solicitously drove Tom home, then returned to Lowth's to publicize his virtue and bask in the anticipated warm acclaim: "Well, that's my good deed for the day," he said, in tones just loud enough to drown the bar-room cacophony, "I've taken Tom home." Whereupon the publican, Joe Vandeleur, jerked his thumb in the direction of the end of the bar, and all eyes followed it in a silence that was eloquent of dark conspiracy. There stood Tom, who had seconds before emptied out of a taxi and rolled into the bar. Quaffing a pot, he beamed at the disbelieving Heatley who was engulfed by thunderous waves of beery merriment.

In parliament, Tom eventually laid his alcoholic ghost to rest by hurling back invective, the very scurrility of which made the abuse he himself received seem like sycophantic praise. One Minister of the Crown said, "The first time I ever saw Tom Aikens was when he was lying in the gutter outside the Queen's Hotel in Cloncurry," to which Tom retorted, "The first time I ever saw the Minister was when he, as an AWU organizer, was asleep on the thunder box of the Nonda pub, his pants down around his ankles and the flies having a harvest time." Before the shock of that could subside, Tom added for good measure, "and the first time I ever saw his colleague, that dirty, dribbling dipsomaniac, Forgan Smith, was in the back yard of the Post Office Hotel in Cloncurry, running for the dunny, also with his pants down around his ankles and excreta oozing down his legs."

When the tales of Tom's drinking invariably ricocheted to the discomfort of the story-tellers, they were less and less frequently told. For a time, some tried moving the attack on to another, even less salubrious, plane, but neither did that seem to work: "Tell us about the time you rode a boy," jeered Mick Brosnan, while Tom was actually delivering a speech in parliament. "No, you tell us; after all, you were the boy," Tom shot back.

Certainly Aikens' drinking had no effect on his political career, except in the wholly ironic sense that, by being the indirect cause of his translation to the larger sphere of state

politics, it only magnified and enhanced it: if the ALP had not chosen it as the ostensible reason for expelling him from the party, Tom might never have decided to oppose the ALP and run for parliament, thereafter becoming an irritating, sometimes even painful, thorn in its flesh that the ALP never succeeded in dislodging. And once in parliament, Tom stayed there. He not only never concealed from his constituents the fact and extent of his former drinking but turned it into a positive electoral advantage. What was more shameful: a man's one weakness or the relentless attacks of the monolithic ALP machine on its uncowed victim? What was more worthy of admiration: the ALP's exposure of a man's heavy drinking, or that same man's courage and strength of character in giving it up when he wanted to? In his maiden speech in parliament, Tom even managed to compare himself quite plausibly with Jesus Christ:

> I ask only this: that if there is any scandal to be said about me, I ask him who is going to say it . . . to go to Mundingburra to say it, or come to Townsville to say it. I will arrange their platform, I will advertise their meetings, and I will give them a complete indemnity against any action I may have against them for libel or defamation in respect of anything they might say, irrespective of the turgid depths their filthy mentality may descend to. No man can make a fairer offer than that. My experience has been this: that when you persecute a man then the people themselves rise and vote against the slanderers and scandal-mongers unless they can prove their charges to the hilt. . . . Let my opponents accept the challenge and meet me. Let them come to the North where I was born and bred and defame me. If they do, it will mean another thousand votes to me at the next election. The people of Mundingburra and the people of Townsville know me. They know, as I have told them from the platform, that I am no shrinking violet or perfumed pansy. They know all about me. There is nothing about me the people who sent me here do not know. I want to tell you something that happened and something that was said. A prominent minister in Mundingburra was asked by a parishioner prior to election day for whom he intended to vote. He said, "For Aikens." The parishioner said, "wasn't there some scandal about his drinking some years ago?" And the minister said, "There is always scandal about public men; there was considerable scandal about Christ; but we are not selecting a keeper of the pearly gates, we are electing a member of Parliament; and it is far better to send to Parliament a sinner with guts than a saint with none.[21]

Nevertheless, the initial struggle of wills, the mutual loathing, when Tom first entered parliament was so intense that the ALP

decided to resort to the ultimate arbitrament, physical intimidation, in its attempt to silence and subdue Aikens. A man equally as burly as Aikens, E.J. Walsh, Minister for Transport in the Cooper government, embarked upon a programme of calculated provocation with only one possible end in view. The baiting began even as Aikens delivered his maiden speech[22] and continued for nearly three months until, on 31 October 1944, Walsh finally spat out the word "yellow".[23] Aikens was on his feet in a trice and invited Walsh outside to repeat what he had said. The two men reached the lobby, closely followed by an aghast Speaker and a nervous press of prospective onlookers. In the lobby the Speaker attempted to interpose himself between Aikens and Walsh's supporters who appeared on the point of attacking Aikens *en masse*. Suddenly, moving in from behind his cohorts, Walsh landed a stinging thwack on Aikens' ear that goaded him into a furious advance on his tormentor. Lurching forward to deliver what he clearly intended to be the decisive knock-out, Tom slipped on the floor of the lobby, which shone like polished glass, and fell heavily against a wooden bench. His eye was laid open in the fall—a wound that later required an anti-tetanus injection and some stitches—and blood spattered the bench, the walls, Tom's shirt and Walsh's pants. With one sleeve of his shirt practically ripped off and his face covered in blood, Tom presented a fearsome spectacle as he now came at Walsh in a blind frenzy. This time Tom landed some "real beauties" on the object of his rage, and one unbiassed observer who later claimed some knowledge of the finer points of fighting, not to say boxing, thought that had the fight continued much longer Aikens would have "literally eaten his man". "However, the principals in this exhibition of tap-room brawling were parted before the fight had gone far enough for an impartial judge to give a decision. . . . "[24]

Aikens' moral victory over Walsh had a symbolic as well as purely physical aspect which did not escape the notice of ALP and Hermit Park men in Brisbane and Townsville. It began to dawn on the ALP that the Hermit Park Labour Party might actually be there to stay, despite even fisticuffs, indeed probably more certainly because of them. Accordingly in 1945 the ALP put out "reconciliation feelers" in an attempt to heal the breach before the local government elections which were due early in 1946.[25] At a joint meeting of representatives of Hermit Park and all ALP branches in Townsville, there was "unanimous" agreement on the terms of Hermit Park's readmittance to the ALP.[26] These were substantially the same as those agreed to by the

The Speaker's Lobby, Parliament House, Brisbane–scene of the Aikens-Walsh fight.

Deputy Premier, Hanlon, in 1943, except that in accordance with a pledge which the rebels had made, the entire branch would have to be reinstated rather than individual members on application.[26] There was jubilation in Townsville where some of the breakaway members "were living and hoping for the day when they could get back into the ALP,"[28] while in Brisbane "men closely associated with the Labour movement . . . were glad the breach was being healed; it was news that had been expected."[29] However, in January 1946, the secretary of the QCE

(S.J. Bryan) advised the combined ALP branches in Townsville that the renegades would each have to apply, cap in hand, for the necessary absolution.[30]

The war in the Pacific had now ended abruptly, and the onset of Cold War in Europe before long led to considerable disenchantment among the Hermit Park men with their communist allies in Townsville. "If the branch decides to run with the Communists," said Alderman Murgatroyd, "I for one will not be a candidate."[31] News of the QCE's latest rebuff, however, had the effect of again uniting the apostates in single-minded defiance of the ALP. "Believing as we do that disunity among the working class and useful people at the polls would merely play into the hands of the anti-progressive and anti-working class candidates" (the phrasing had an unmistakable Aikensian ring), the Hermit Park Labour Party decided to nominate seven candidates for the aldermanic vacancies at the municipal election in April and to ask the electors to complete their papers by including three of the Communist Party's nominees.[32] The only concession to a changing post-war political climate was that on this occasion the two parties would not campaign, as they had in 1943, under a single party banner.[33]

The growing realization in the ALP that Aikens and his team ought perhaps to be joined if they could not be beaten—a mood that had produced the concerted, if abortive, movement for appeasement in 1945—was also reflected in the 1946 Townsville municipal election. Official ALP policy was "to preserve the efficiency" of the municipal enterprises that Hermit Park Labour had established.[34] Nor was the ALP alone in appearing to recognize the futility of opposing the Hermit Park team: a motley collection of independent right-wing candidates was unable to find even the modicum of common interest and enthusiasm necessary to run together as a "ratepayers' team", thereby offering at least the semblance of a viable opposition. Their erstwhile champions, the local press, were equally prescient about the electoral outcome and merely affected a bored editorial yawn. The *Register* was even cautiously prepared to support the Hermit Park team, at least to the extent of exhorting electors "to select those they considered best fitted to carry out the duties that accompany office, irrespective of party or other considerations". Less adventurously, the *Bulletin* deplored how "cramped" the free expression of aldermen had become under what was virtually one-party government, but even that lone plaint was confined to a duty-bound editorial on election day.[35]

The seven sitting Hermit Park aldermen were all returned in

"a sweeping success for the breakaway Labour faction",[36] though the two communist aldermen, Matzkows and Hills, succumbed to growing public distaste for the souring Soviet *entente*. Tom Aikens again topped the poll, and the Hermit Park Labour Party considered that it had won a resounding mandate "to continue its fight as a separate entity for labour ideals as set down by the pioneers of the Labour movement".[37] It was no idle boast on the part of the triumphal Hermit Park aldermen that the QCE was treating "with contempt" the wishes of "the whole of the Labour movement in Townsville",[38] for the Trades and Labour Council promptly and unanimously congratulated them on their re-election.[39]

Another interested onlooker who clearly hoped that the QCE of the ALP would long remain "contemptuous" of the labour movement in Townsville was the Leader of the Opposition in the national parliament in Canberra, R.G. Menzies, who donated £50 to the Hermit Park campaign.[40]

12

Keelbottomite Deviationism and NQLPism

The recurrence of localism in north Queensland, the frequency with which it has been able both to blur and transcend wider social and political allegiances, is a phenomenon that has recently been shown to have definite historical antecedents.[1] In the case of Townsville its strength was exemplified in the fact that purely local sentiments not only engendered and sustained the Hermit Park Labour Party but also, finally, proved its nemesis.

On the one hand, Hermit Park Labour demonstrated its ability to hold in its ranks "without exception every prominent member of the Labour Movement in Townsville".[2] True, the original dispute with the ALP had contained certain quasi-ideological elements, such as the question whether communism represented an alien threat to the working-class movement or merely socialism militant, and the rebels saw themselves as upholders of, rather than deviants from, true working-class traditions. But at bottom the schism between the ALP and Hermit Park was a local revolt against remote, prejudiced and uninformed officialdom which dictated policy on the basis of insufficient knowledge of local conditions. On the other hand, when the inevitable desertions from Hermit Park eventually occurred, they were motivated not by any sense of ideological incompatibility (or, conversely, by a more simple ideological nostalgia for the ALP) but by disagreement over the most local of Townsville local issues. Equally, we might postulate that the inability of Hermit Park Labour to broaden its political base throughout north Queensland was due not merely, nor even primarily, to ideological repugnance (for there was definite working-class sympathy outside Townsville "with the sentiments which, in the first place, necessitated the establishment of the Hermit Park Party")[3] but to plain local exclusiveness. The issue which was not only the first but also the fatal chink in the armour

of Hermit Park solidarity turned on that most perennial of Townsville local concerns, the provision of water.

Climate in Australia north of the Tropic of Capricorn is classic in its seasonal inconstancy. From May to September, almost the only part of the region likely to receive useful falls of rain is the narrow coastal belt north of Tully. Sometimes by October, often by November and almost always by December, local convectional thunder storms bring sporadic relief from the dry conditions, but most northern areas receive between 70 per cent and 95 per cent of their annual rainfall during the three months of January, February and March. This, however, is only the *normal* course of seasonal events, and the "normal" season is frequently unknown throughout much of the region. "The climate gods of Northern Australia always hold a trump card which they play or withhold as suits their fancy—variability of rainfall."[4] To the north Queenslander, "When it rains it's not in reason, but drought one year and flood next season".[5]

Townsville's water supply was insufficient, even for its normal population of about 30 000, if the "Wet" failed. At the beginning of 1943 not only was the "Wet" reluctant to arrive but thousands of additional troops did, imposing an impossible burden on the city reservoirs and the patience of the civilian population. On the other hand, at the beginning of 1946, as the Hermit Park aldermen stomped to the municipal hustings, it rained as it never had before in living memory: "the force of the water is indicated by the huge movements of sand and general erosion . . . while at Alligator Creek the railway bridge was swept away and the steel rails which spanned it were tossed and twisted like pieces of soft wire. . . . Townsville has never suffered such devastation from a flood."[6] In Hermit Park, water lapped the floor-boards of Arthur Murgatroyd's home, more than two metres above ground level.

Ross River had been the principal source of Townsville's water supply from the time the city was founded. Wells were sunk into the sandy bed of the river or into the gravel beds underneath the alluvial flats forming part of its delta. They soon proved inadequate, and three weirs were subsequently run across the river in 1912 (Gleeson's), 1928 (Aplin's) and 1934 (Black School). Since stream gaugings and the collection of other data on possible alternative sources of supply (Black River, Alligator Creek, Crystal Creek, Keelbottom Creek and the Burdekin River) were not begun until 1923, Aplin's and the Black School weirs were essentially stopgap measures pending the completion of full investigations. That they also postponed the sort of heavy

expenditure which more permanent schemes would have entailed, was also, of course, a further and by no means inconsequential consideration.

Little rain fell for more that eighteen months after the completion of the Black School weir, and 1935 was the first year in living memory that the Ross River had actually failed to flow. The newest weir, built at a cost of £71 000 and intended to hold 3735 million litres, in fact remained empty. At a special meeting of the City Council on 27 November 1935, it was resolved "that no further expenditure in the development of the Ross River water supply scheme be undertaken other than maintenance of existing works, and that the Crystal Creek gravitation scheme be adopted as Townsville's future water supply . . . and carried into effect when finance became available".[7] However, the State Irrigation and Water Supply authority decided that it "could not entertain a recommendation that funds of such magnitude be allotted for a particular scheme to the exclusion of all others . . . in the absence of actual surveys, stream gaugings and other data". For the time being, nothing could be done.

In 1941, what soon became known in Townsville as the Nimmo Report advised the state government that a dam across Keelbottom Creek, a tributary of the Burdekin River on the western side of the coastal range to the northwest of Townsville, presented "the greatest potentialities for the water supply of Townsville", but that, as an interim priority, the construction of a 97 km pipeline to Crystal Creek near Mount Spec could supply the city with an additional 4.6 million litres of water daily.[8]

The problem of deciding in what order and to what extent the development of the Keelbottom and Crystal Creek (Mount Spec) schemes should be implemented, became the most divisive and emotive issue in the history of Townsville local politics. As the strains of military occupation became more and more acute, debate raged and citizens took sides. On the one hand, there were those who agreed with the *Bulletin* that the Council must "make one bite at its water scheme and be done with it", opt for Keelbottom and "stay its hand on Mt Spec altogether, lest the cost involved . . . may embarrass when the time comes for consideration of one of the larger schemes".[9] On the other hand, there were those who thought that the Nimmo Report's recommendations should be accepted and that a pipeline to Crystal Creek ought to take precedence, whatever the merits of more permanent objectives.

Within the Hermit Park Labour Party two factions were

forming. Aikens' successor as Deputy Mayor, Vic Hamilton, together with Jim Corcoran and Andy Illich, were Keelbottomites; Aikens, Abercrombie, O'Brien and Murgatroyd were anti-Keelbottomites. Nasty rumours began to circulate to the effect that the Keelbottomites were betraying their working-class origins and that they were in league with, if not actually in the pay of, big business interests which would benefit from the construction of the Keelbottom dam. There were no cement works in Townsville, and all concerte would have to be brought in by the two merchant firms that dominated local commerce. The Keelbottomites were, from the standpoint of Hermit Park Jacobinism, right-wing deviationists.

Tom watched what was going on with growing concern. Although no longer Deputy Mayor his constituency was still in Townsville, and he could not afford to ignore any sign of incipient dissension. "Power corrupts," he mused, "there's no doubt about it. We had some fellows in the party who had never been used to any authority at all, but we made them chairman of this and chairman of that . . . and they started to mix with the upper crust. They began to think and act with a tenner in their pockets. They forgot Kipling's lesson that if you can mix with crowds and keep your virtue, you can consort with kings yet never lose the common touch."[10] Eventually, tempers became so frayed that the Hermit Park aldermanic Caucus decided to allow its members a free vote on the water supply question in order to head off a party split. At a meeting of the Council which two of the anti-Keelbottomites were unable to attend (O'Brien and Hills), the Crystal Creek scheme was rejected. Hamilton, Corcoran, Illich, Parry (the only Independent) and the Mayor opposed it; Aikens, Murgatroyd, Abercrombie and Matzkows supported it.[11]

But Aikens was not going to be beaten by a quirk of mere numbers. He first did some hurried research and ascertained from the Council solicitor that a motion could indeed be moved twice, even again and again until ruled out of order as a tedious repetition. Then, without saying a word to the other anti-Keelbottomites but carefully confirming that they would be present at the next meeting of the Council, he gleefully informed an expostulating Mayor Gill of the propriety of his procedure and watched the Council reverse its decision of the previous month. The voting on this occasion was six to five: the anti-Keelbottomites in a bloc (Aikens, Abercrombie, O'Brien, Murgatroyd, Matzkows and Hills) against Hamilton, Corcoran, Illich, Parry and Gill.[12]

There, at least in any normal circumstances, the matter presumably would have rested. But no; passions were so inflamed. There was one course of action still remaining to the Keelbottomites, a last resort, which, especially in view of the taunting challenge thrown down by their opponents, they equally did not hesitate to take up. A petition for a local government referendum was put in circulation and the requisite number of signatures obtained.[13] To Tom, "it was the most amazing poll ever held in Townsville. There was Murgatroyd, Abercrombie, O'Brien, the two communists and myself taking on the combined strength of the press and the Chamber of Commerce. We took on the whole world, and they had all the money and all the influence. They put up photos all over the place, and the *Bulletin* castigated and scarified us."[14] The view held by the Keelbottomites was that the time had arrived when a comprehensive scheme should be undertaken, not a subsidiary one; agitation for a subsidiary water supply had arisen during the grim days of 1942 and 1943, but those days had now passed; the ultimate water scheme favoured by the state advising engineers was a dam at Keelbottom Creek; there should be no recourse to the proposed 37.5 cm Mount Spec pipeline.[15] For their part, the anti-Keelbottomites advocated the immediate implementation of the Nimmo Report, which embodied the best advice that the state had to offer.

When the numbers went up, Aikens' faction won comfortably by some three thousand votes out of a total of fourteen thousand.[16] The *Bulletin*'s only dazed comment on the result was more an expression of surprise that there had been no "untoward incidents" at the polling booths "considering the interest evinced in the prior controversies on the water supply subject".[17]

An acute shortage of steel throughout Australia at the end of the war meant that, for the time being, nothing could be done to advance the Mount Spec scheme. In fact, it was not until the end of 1946 that the Council's engineers received instructions to begin full-scale construction. Then, passions which had lain dormant for some eighteen months were suddenly rekindled with an announcement by the City Engineer, F.H. Brazier, that he was opposed to the pipeline project: "I wish to make it clear to this and to all succeeding Councils that in my opinion the development of the Mt Spec scheme in preference to the Keelbottom scheme is wrong and wish to disclaim any responsibility for the original decision of the Council."[18]

The Keelbottomite aldermen—Hamilton, Corcoran and Illich —were jubilant at this unexpected, unsolicited, and withal expert

espousal of their cause, and leapt at the opportunity of embarrassing their recent adversaries. According to Hamilton, the people of Townsville had been duped by "I-me-my" Tom; they were "the victims of the greatest political dump that has ever been put over any local authority in Queensland: the Council had ignored the advice of its own engineer and had been guided by the opinions of engineers in Brisbane."[19] Two could play the game of democratic snakes and ladders and, for the Keelbottomites, outraged local hubris was a long and liberating ladder.

Not quite as long, however, as the referendum proved for the anti-Keelbottomites. "Pooger" O'Brien bitterly assailed the Keelbottomites for forgetting the popular commitment to Mount Spec. It had been passed at the Council table and at the polls, but "now there was an eleventh-hour attempt to defeat it because certain members at the table were lining up with the Chamber of Commerce".[20] Dour Jim Corcoran leapt to his feet, his face crimson with rage.

"I have never lined up with the Chamber of Commerce", he protested.

"You have and you bloody know it", insisted "Pooger".

"You're a filthy liar", screamed Corcoran.[21]

It was the final, unforgivable affront.

At the next meeting of the Hermit Park Labour Party on 23 February 1947 there were "heated exchanges" between Corcoran and O'Brien.[22] Corcoran demanded that the branch "deal with" the member who had made "insulting statements" about him at the Council table.[23] Tom vividly remembers the scene. "The chairman said he couldn't ask O'Brien to apologize because the aldermen had been given a free vote on the Mt. Spec scheme, and Corcoran and O'Brien had chosen different sides. So Corcoran stood up in a huff—I really think it was a huff—and stalked out of the meeting in high dungeon, as 'Nugget' Jesson would say. Illich followed him without saying a word, and they never came back."[24]

On the basis of yet another report from the state government upholding the Nimmo recommendations, the City Engineer and even the Keelbottomite aldermen finally conceded defeat, and the Council again endorsed its earlier decision to proceed with the Mount Spec water supply scheme. To Brazier, explaining his volte-face, the crux of the report just received from the government lay in the fact that its advisers had reaffirmed their earlier recommendation: Crystal Creek *storage* was not to form any part of the development of their scheme, but Crystal Creek without storage, in conjunction with Ross River, would meet

Townsville's requirements until 1960. Brazier himself did not agree with this conclusion "in the light of last year's run-off from Crystal Creek and Townsville's present water consumption". There were also members of the Council who agreed with him and not with the recommendations of the government's engineers. But he was prepared to compromise his own views in the interests of municipal harmony: "I would suggest that as the Government has, through its advisers, given a definite reply to the Council's request for reconsideration of this matter, the Government advice must be accepted."[25] Brazier's capitulation signified the end of the controversy over Keelbottom Creek, and a magnanimous Tom commended him for his "philosophical and broad-minded attitude".[26]

For the anti-Keelbottomites, however, it proved a Pyrrhic victory. Despite repeated denials that "members of the [Hermit Park Labour] party were considering rejoining the official ALP", the Deputy Mayor, Vic Hamilton, announced his resignation in July.[27] A few months later, he, Corcoran and Illich were received back into the ALP.[28] Unofficial approaches were also made to the remaining members of the Hermit Park Labour Party to accept the QCE's offer that individual applications to rejoin the ALP would be considered on their merits. But the ranks held fast. Arthur Murgatroyd indignantly informed all and sundry that the overwhelming majority of "members of this ALP [*sic*] still stood by the terms previously submitted to the official Labor Party, one of which was that, as they were put out of the official Labor Party as a branch, they would only go back as a branch and not as individuals".[29]

1947 was a black year for the Hermit Park Labour Party. Not only had it lost three of its leading aldermen, including the Deputy Mayor, but its vision of a socialist utopia in Townsville assumed the aspect of an ever-receding mirage. To the citizens of war-time Townsville, socialism had seemed a sensible solution to the problem of scarcity and want; after the war, it began to seem like an unnecessary obstruction to the cornucopia of plenty. Plans for the establishment of a municipal bakery foundered because the Fruit and Vegetable Mart had already lost customers to new post-war competitors.[30] Aldermen were "disgusted" at the "fickleness" of the public.[31] To Aikens, the disloyalty of the working man to his own local government "has got me sick to the back teeth. It would be madness, it would be dishonest to establish a municipal bakery in view of what has happened to the municipal fruit mart."[32] The municipal ice-works was also in trouble, losing money during the winter

months and just barely managing to recoup its losses from summer sales.[33] Finally, the Mount Spec water controversy had its sequel in the defeat of a Hermit Park proposal for the municipalization of Townsville's bus services when the three Keelbottomite defectors voted with the Opposition and thereby at last exacted their retribution.[34]

At the end of 1947 and throughout 1948 local government in Townsville degenerated into a tripartite contest of mud-slinging and table-banging in which "venom, acerbity, acrimony and vitriol were mingled freely".[35] C.M.J. Butcher and W.M. Breen, both ALP, had defeated the communists, Matzkows and Hills, at the 1946 municipal election, and after Hamilton, Corcoran and Illich were readmitted to the ALP at the beginning of 1948 the ALP aldermen formed the largest bloc at the Council table. However, they still lacked an overall majority. Aikens, Abercrombie, Murgatroyd and O'Brien glowered and ranted across the Council table at Hamilton, Corcoran, Illich, Butcher and Breen, while the two Independents, Gill and Parry, tried either to duck the cross-fire or, less frequently, interpose themselves as referees. The January 1948 meeting of the Council lapsed for want of a quorum, whereupon the Jacobins transformed the "packed and waiting gallery" into a forum for the airing of Hermit Park grievances.[36] The February meeting ended in deadlock. According to the *Bulletin* one alderman was "unflinching, another unbending, another pig-headed, another determined, another obdurate", with the result that "city business was relegated to a low priority".[37] At another meeting Alderman Murgatroyd stigmatized the "betrayal" of Corcoran as "one of the meanest, most petty and most despicable" acts he had ever known.[38] He remembered the day when Alderman Corcoran, who had formed the original Hermit Park ALP, had said: "If the time ever comes and only two are left in the Hermit Park ALP, then one of them will be Jim Corcoran."[39] Corcoran did not deny the imputation.

The defection of Hamilton, Corcoran and Illich, like that of Queen Christina, might well have been the signal for others to follow. Indeed a newly formed, official Hermit Park branch of the ALP requested the QCE to give it a ruling "as to applications for membership received from members of the breakaway Hermit Park branch".[40] What the defection signified, of course, was that the passionate and righteous excitement of revolt had given way to a more mellow afterglow of reconsideration and regret. It signified, too, that the claims of Hermit Park Labour to have inherited the mantle of ALP legitimacy—that is to say,

from an official party which persistently flouted and defiled working-class traditions—were henceforth going to be difficult to sustain. Indeed, the great danger to Hermit Park Labour, if continuous defections from its ranks made it appear more and more local in character, was that localism might prove a shirt of Nessus, poisoning the very body it warmed.

Aikens saw that his party was in dire straits and that its very survival depended on swift succour from new allies. With a bravura some might have thought at least faintly reminiscent of the Greeks at Missolonghi, admitting of no defeat, he now appealed for the support of north Queenslanders as a whole, and at the beginning of 1949 the North Queensland Labour Party was born.

A decision to transmogrify the Hermit Park Labour Party into the North Queensland Labour Party had been taken at the last monthly meeting of the "Hermit Park ALP" on Sunday, 30 January 1949. The idea slowly germinated in members' minds as a result of Tom's convincing re-election to parliament in the 1947 state election. During the course of the campaign, Tom was being hailed as "one of the finest and most convincing political speakers in the State";[41] Hermit Park also received requests from a number of north Queensland towns—Mackay, Charters Towers, Hughenden, Innisfail, Cairns, Chillagoe and Mount Isa—"for the activities of the party to be extended" to those centres. Five years had already gone by since the split with the ALP, and few now hoped that "justice would prevail and a reconciliation be effected with the official Labor Party on the terms laid down by the Hermit Park ALP".[42] Had not the time therefore arrived to abandon any such hope and to extend the party's activities throughout the state? After all, the revolt of Hermit Park was not merely a negative stand against injustice; it was a positive stand for provincial, grass-roots idealism; a crusade, to be sure, against metropolitan cynicism and corruption. Tom had made that clear with his very first words in the Legislative Assembly: "So I say it is necessary, in order that the right thing be done by the people and farmers, that the Labor Party purge itself of the elements that are bringing it to ultimate destruction. Today the Labor Party is shot through with corruption and sectarian bigotry."[43]

The "expansion movement" did not immediately take place, however, because of opposition to it from Hermit Park Labour's recent partners, the Communist Party, as well as from a number of northern Trades and Labour Councils, on the ground that it would "split the Labor Movement and serve no good

purpose".[44] Speaking in Mackay, the Prime Minister, J.B. Chifley, also thought that the Hermit Park bandwagon should be brought to a stop: "There are all sorts of people under the Labour umbrella, some for the purpose of disruption. Labour has no place for opportunists. . . . It is not always easy for the man in the street to understand why those in power made certain decisions."[45]

Within a month of the foundation of the North Queensland Labour Party in 1949, however, branches had been formed in Innisfail and Mackay, the former with a surprisingly vigorous membership of fifty.[46] "Official Labour's débâcle in North Queensland is not far off," crowed an exultant Arthur Murgatroyd, who now added the foundation secretaryship of the North Queensland Labour Party to his long list of working-class laurels.[47]

Actually, the boot was on the other foot for, notwithstanding its dashing sally into north Queensland territory, the NQLP found one foot still stuck in the noisome mire of Townsville local politics. Using a slightly different metaphor, Aikens admitted, "the defection [of Hamilton, Corcoran and Illich] had left those in the Council dancing around, or marching up and down, without being able to forge ahead."[48] Another local election was under way, and virtually all that the NQLP could find to say about itself was that it remained a "fighting people's organization".[49] The 1949 municipal campaign presented the distinctly unedifying spectacle of NQLP and ALP pouring vitriol on each other,[50] the NQLP writhing to shake off the communist embrace,[51] and NQLP aldermen confessing abjectly, "there had been no progress, because the party had been unable to pursue its policy on which it had been returned in 1943 and 1946."[52] The Communist Party, though without the agreement of the NQLP, actually included the names of two of the NQLP aldermen, Aikens and O'Brien, on its how-to-vote dodger.[53]

In all this confusion and murk there was only one tiny gleam of light: the promise of a new Townsville Citizens' Association of young, eager candidates, mostly respected businessmen, offering *action* and a release from the straitjacket of "party politicking".[54] Smelling victory, the TCA began to campaign three weeks before election day; rarely before had municipal campaigns run for more than two weeks. Accordingly, for what was assuredly not the first time in an election and indubitably would not be the last, the people of Townsville voted sternly against all working-class candidates rather than for the untried "citizens' team". Among the successful TCA aldermen it was

acknowledged that their team had deliberately set out to "capitalize" on the "bickering and squabbling" in the Council during 1948 and that they had swept into power because of it.[55] The débâcle was total. Not a single working-class candidate was returned, though Aikens polled more votes than any other, ALP as well as NQLP, and just missed out on the tenth aldermanic place.[56] In Innisfail, the NQLP team was annihilated. NQLPism was stillborn.

The year 1948 lingered long in the memories of Townsville electors. Although the NQLP contested three more municipal elections (1952, 1955 and 1958), it was consistently trounced. Again, it was not so much that people voted for the TCA as against the alternatives. TCA campaigns were extraordinarily inept and even insultingly smug. The newspaper advertisements with which the TCA opened its campaigns in the 1952, 1955 and 1958 elections were *exactly* the same; they merely reminded readers of "eight years of political rule" before 1949.[57] Incredibly, the second advertisements in each campaign were also near replicas of one another, pointing to the TCA's solid achievement in the construction of footpaths. It was as though the TCA were so surprised by their success (or so convinced of the citizens' obsession with footpaths) that they dared not deviate from the magical formula for re-election.

Nobody would have guessed it from the tone of insufferable pomposity, but the *Bulletin* was very probably right when it commented on the outcome of the 1952 municipal election:

> It would now appear that Townsvilleans are of fixed opinion that local authority administration and party politics do not mix and that they will look back on the 1939–1949 decade as one of the indiscretions tested out by the electors of this city. It can be regarded that there will be no general desire to resume the type of local authority government which was endured between the end of the fourth and fifth decades of this century. That period should ever be before the people as a grim reminder of the folly of the past and should serve as a strengthening of resolve to prevent a repetition in the future."[58]

Yet there was a loyal nucleus of working-class voters that patently cherished its own memories of the heyday of the Hermit Park ALP. In every election during the 1950s, the NQLP team outstripped all other ALP candidates.[59] But no working-class candidate, whatever his label, really stood a chance against the TCA in that era of growth and affluence; indeed, in recognition of that fact, the NQLP finally bowed out of local politics as the "Tom Aikens' Team".[60] The *Bulletin* editorialized: "It was

noticeable that on the how-to-vote card of the Tom Aikens' Team, the party was not even tagged Labour [but even so] the lowest member of the Tom Aikens' Team secured more votes than the highest member of the ALP."[61] It was an unequivocal tribute both to the calibre of the man who had guided the party's fortunes for so long and to the enduring public esteem in which he was still held.

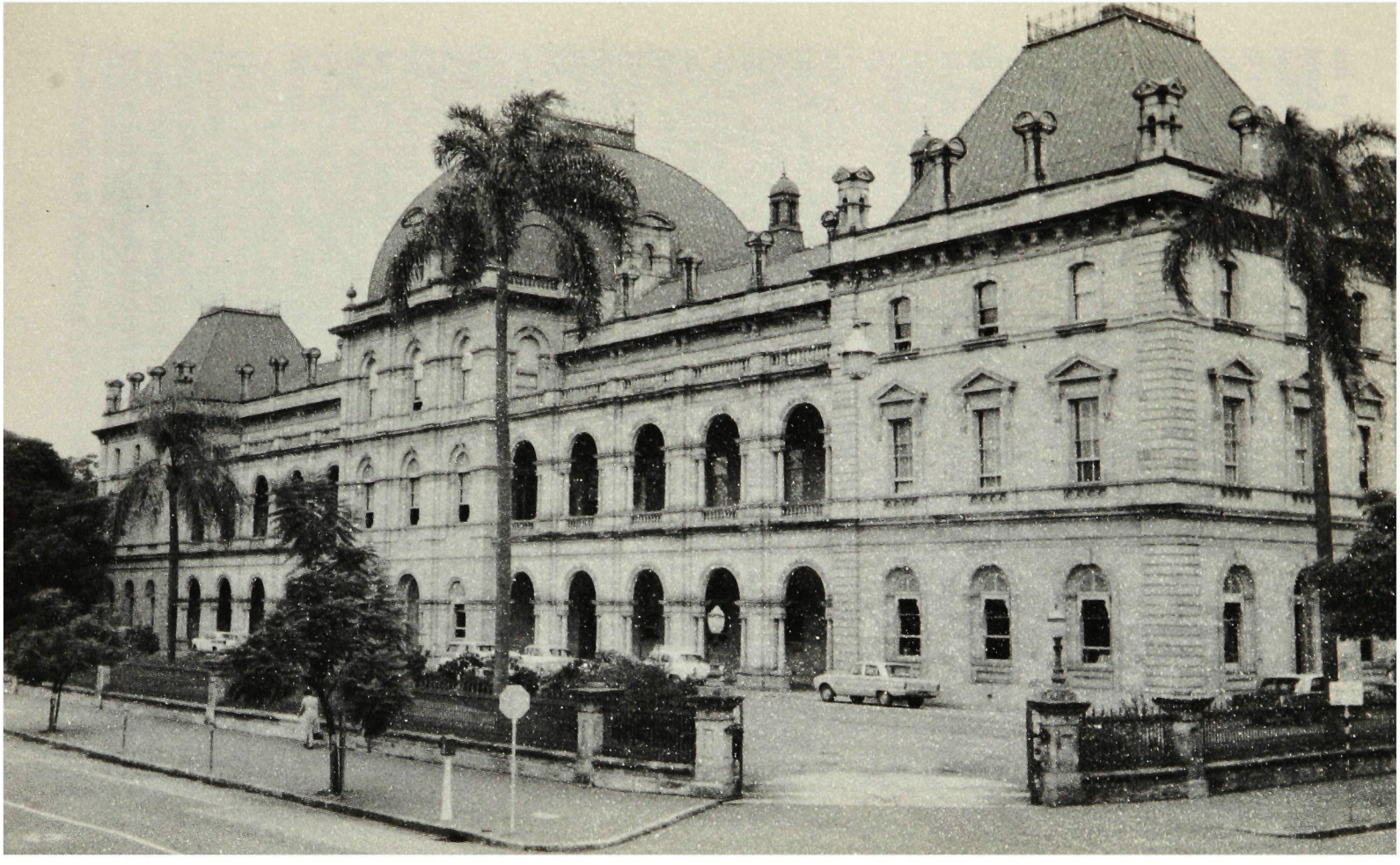
13

At the Wailing Wall

In 1970 a prominent textbook on Australian government commented that "no electorate consistently returns independents" to federal and state houses of parliament.[1] An exception, of course, was the return of the Independent member for Townsville South to the Queensland state parliament who had then only recently won re-election for the tenth consecutive time. Still, to say that the political life of Independents is evanescent undoubtedly expresses a general truth about the Australian political scene, and indeeed about all modern, democratic political systems. Since the nineteenth century electors have given their allegiance not to Independents but to parties broadly representing either a working-class Left or a more economically privileged Right.[2] There have been frequent deviations from this pattern, but nearly always the mere passage of time erodes whatever original basis there may have been for rejecting traditional forms of political association and action. Independents are either eased out or squeezed out by larger and richer parties with whom they find it difficult, often impossible, to compete.

Sometimes, atypical forms of political allegiances manage to develop a "life of their own" and persist long after the rational basis for their existence has gone; allegiances can be formed which are unrelated both to the social structure of the electorate and to the affinities normally found between party programmes and group support.[3] Sometimes, too, though usually for much briefer periods, a group may be wrested from its traditional party by political tactics, novel appeals or an attractive candidate.[4] It was an unusually attractive candidate who survived, as Aikens did, for more than thirty years.

There is no doubt that Tom became more and more attractive as a politician during the 1950s when he no longer had to contend with his youth, his drinking and his aldermanic rivals. He was his own politician for the first time since he had entered



The Wailing Wall. Parliament House, Brisbane.

politics in 1924 as a Shire Councillor in Cloncurry. To his surprise he found that he liked it; the man had at last found his *métier*. For a start, there was plenty of time—more than he had ever had before—and both his manner and style of living became more mellow and relaxed. Parliament in Brisbane transacted its business at a very leisurely pace; for about half the year it lay empty. The days at home also seemed much longer when there was no longer any gin to make the hours race. He decided that he must not only stay at home when parliament was not in session but that he would also return home as often as he could when it was. His parliamentary colleagues thought that, in order to be a successful politician, it was necessary to live in Brisbane, close to the seat of government and power. However, when Tom fought and won elections on the issue of representing people full-time, which among other things meant being available whenever they wanted you, it was noticeable that more and more honourable members moved their homes back to the north.

Naturally, not only Tom's constituents benefitted from the long hours that he now put in at home. The Johnstone River couch in his yard was better watered, greener and more neatly trimmed than most other lawns in Townsville; the crotons, their reds and yellows almost irridescent in the tropical evening half-light, seemed more brilliant than most; the gardens in the backyard, deeply dug and fastidiously shaped, were prolific with table vegetables; the paint on the ordinary, timber house seemed a shade more fresh and colourful than its neighbours in Soule Street. By now, Tom had also trimmed himself down to a svelte 98 kg and found that it did a man good to wander down the back streets of his home town, yarning with the people he knew and getting to know others, and getting to know his wife. Nearly every Sunday the two of them would stroll together, their grandchildren in tow, to a little salt-water creek that ran through Hermit Park. The children always showed off by diving into the deeper water from the high branches of the mangrove trees and racing each other across the creek. The grandparents sat side by side looking around at the familiar sights, recalling the things they had done, feeling the nostalgia creep into the very marrow of their bones. That was how, in their fifties, they got to know each other again, forgetting about what went on in the world around them, reliving through their grandchildren the pleasant things that had happened in the past. Sometimes, Margaret Aikens came to the creek with a towel wrapped around her one-piece bathing suit. When the children were not looking she would

tip-toe down to the water's edge, drop the towel and then run into the water with her hands and arms clasped tightly across her commodious bosom. The children would splash and shriek with pleasure, and Tom would clap his encouragement and amusement. He had had no idea that little things like these were so delightful.

Margaret Aikens never went to a political function with Tom, not even in the early days in Cloncurry. She never had time then, but in any case Tom never asked her, so it became a habit which she rationalized by saying that "one rat-bag in the family is enough". Occasionally she went a little further, perhaps commenting on the public antics of other politicians' wives: "what a burden she must be to her husband", but it was difficult to be anything other than quiet and self-effacing with Tom as a husband. There was never any question about who had the last word. Once, when Margaret thought little of a certain Premier's wife whose hat, handbag and gloves were even more ostentatious than usual, she gave Tom his cue; absently but unerringly, as though he were addressing a campaign meeting before an audience of the Society of Misogynists, Tom dropped the needle into place on his endlessly spinning record: "How true, I couldn't agree more, particularly when women like that scramble and scratch their way on to the TV screen. I could name dozens like them who are a great handicap to their husband's political image, but who could convince them? The husband certainly couldn't be convinced, for he appears to be completely and supinely hag-ridden by his limelighting wife." Possibly the greatest shock Tom ever had was at a church function in 1955 when Margaret had the last word. "Who's your husband running around with now?" inquired the wife of a prominent ALP supporter. "I don't know, but it certainly isn't you. You're not in Tom's class."

Tom's reputation as a bit of a gay blade was enhanced by his notoriety as a reformed drunk, which made him the most talked-about personage in Townsville. There were few who did not lay claim to possessing some authentic knowledge, some definitive version of the sordid and unsavoury exploits of Tom Aikens. However, apart from the fact that Tom could never resist chatting up anyone, least of all a pretty woman, the stories of his amours were about as reliable as those about the inebriate lying in the gutter outside Lowth's hotel.

In considering the sources of Aikens' growing electoral appeal throughout the 1950s it has to be stressed, above all, that every profession, not excluding that of the politician, has its expertise

and techniques and that Aikens was supremely a professional. With time on his hands after 1949, Tom defined and tested the hypotheses about electoral durability that three decades of experience had so far intuitively taught him to be true. He decided that, among professional techniques, there were several in particular in which the layman expected the professional to have demonstrated a certain competence. Of course, the lay view of professional proficiency rarely corresponded with the professional's own, but unless the latter accommodated the former, professional success—measurable in many ways but not least by public acceptance—would be limited. Lay expectations of a politician were that he should have policies, make speeches, represent his constituents and campaign in elections. The politician who ignored these expectations did so at his peril; conversely, the politician who was adept at all four would consistently prove an attractive and successful candidate. It was doubly important for the Independent, whose candidature against parties was "nonlogical" and therefore precarious, to know which of the techniques, if any, met with greatest public acceptance.[5]

Aikens' policy—"a square go for the North"—certainly struck a responsive chord among his constituents. In every state election between 1947 and 1957 the main issue to Townsvilleans was government neglect of the north and inequitable representation of the north in parliament.[6] A typical view was this:

> The material wealth and potential wealth of North Queensland is vast enough to dazzle the eyes of any nation builder, yet its development has been the result of patient, painstaking, slogging endeavour on the part of its inhabitants without the wholehearted governmental co-operation such a rich area was entitled to expect. The assistance needed for its progress has been wrung slowly and reluctantly from a long succession of governments.[7]

Even the arch-conservative *Bulletin*, a long-time opponent of Hermit Park Jacobinism, had by 1950 come around to support for the NQLP on the basis of its pro-northern platform. On polling day in the state election of that year, Townsville's only daily newspaper noted with a mixture of surprise and pride that the electors of north Queensland were faced with an "unusual" set of political circumstances, because for the first time their region had been made the dominant feature of the campaign. In an indirect but unmistakable tribute to Aikens, it mused that the best political representation would come when people voted for the man and not the party. "If every elector listened

attentively to the individual candidates," it enjoined its readers, "formed an opinion on their ability, sincerity and honesty of purpose, then, after careful consideration, lodged his or her vote, the standard of Parliament would be lifted considerably; brains, personality and eloquence would dominate our legislature, instead of party blocs."[8] A more glowing testimonial to Tom Aikens could hardly have been written, even had he dictated it himself.

Aikens was no advocate of full regional autonomy. True to his working-class origins he always believed that the form of society rather than the form of government was the fundamental issue in politics, and he remained lukewarm, if not actually hostile, towards various recrudescences of the northern New State Movement. According to Tom, the people behind the New State Movement were quite honest in their endeavours but they were chasing a "will-o'-the-wisp". The real solution to local problems lay in the abolition of state parliaments ("those useless excrescences") and the creation of county councils "which would be small parliaments, but with sufficient power to deal with local problems. . . . This is the solution to our problem—not the creation of a new State. We must abolish State parliaments as they exist today, have a national Government with national power and county councils with plenty of power." Still, the NQLP would not oppose a new state in north Queensland "if and when it came", without actively seeking it.[9]

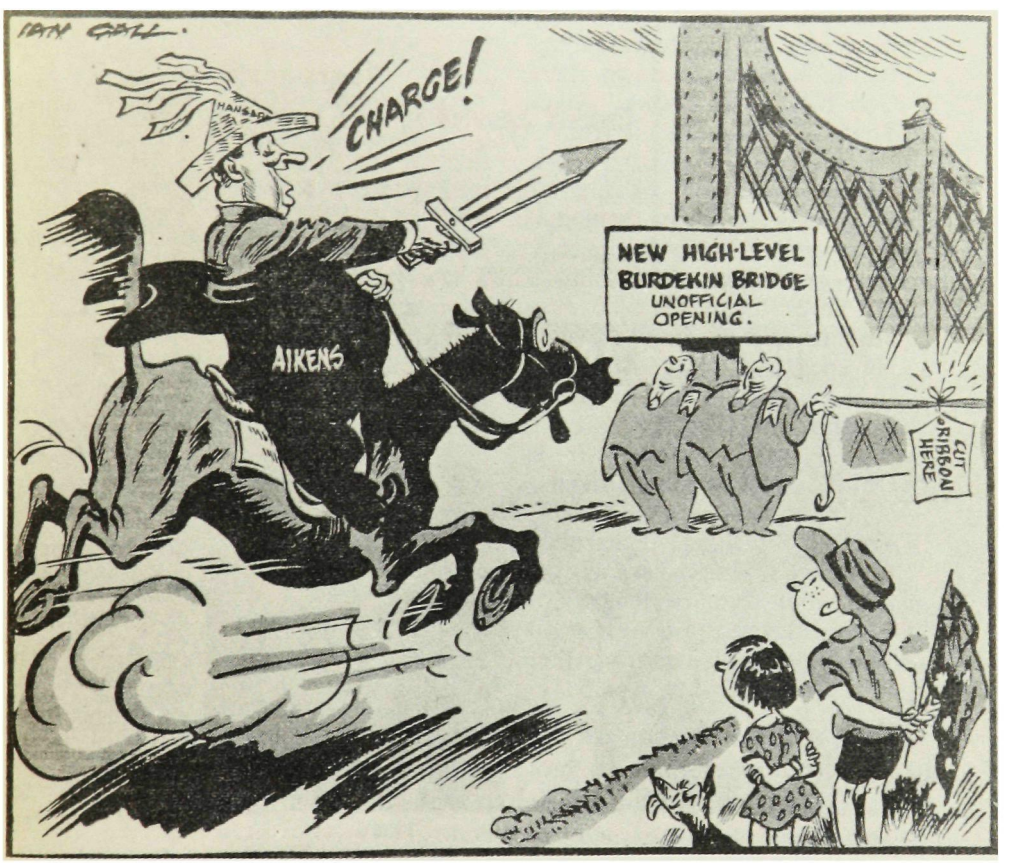
Tom grasped every means of publicizing his "square go" policy for the north, sometimes in quite spectacular ways, for he was by no means averse to the idiosyncratic and attention-riveting escapade. Yet these were invariably put over with panache, stopping short of what his mates might disparagingly call "lairizing" or his opponents castigate as crass exhibitionism. Tom was unlike another contemporary Independent, Frank ("Bombshell") Barnes, who blew through the Queensland parliament in the 1940s, according to Tom "more like a cyclone than a refreshing breeze",[10] kicking in doors or being bodily removed by the police for the sake of a picture in the newspapers. Aikens knew where to draw the line between drollery and asininity, between wit and farce. "Frank said, 'Tom, it doesn't matter what they say as long as they spell your name right.' I said, 'Frank, you're dead wrong; there is good publicity and there is bad."[11] The pranks of Aikens, like his decrepit old bike, always had a point.

There was the "unofficial opening" of the Burdekin bridge, for example. A tenacious and often noisy critic of government

inaction in building a high-level bridge over the Burdekin river, which would end the north's isolation during the "Wet", Tom thought that he deserved rather more kudos for its construction than the Gair government seemed ready to give him in 1957 when it was finally built. A committee was formed in Townsville and Ayr to organize the unofficial opening of the bridge by Aikens.[12] Tentative arrangements were made for a simple but impressive ceremony of dedication at which leading parliamentarians and citizens who had been prominent in the fight for a "square go" for the north would be present. It was also proposed that the ceremony take place on a week day, "so as to avoid the exuberance that is often associated with week-end gatherings".[13] North Queensland soon "buzzed" with reports of a "ribbon-cutting ceremony"; "Aikens is seen as 1957 de Groot", shrieked the press in Brisbane.[14]

Aikens had no intention of going ahead with the plot; he did not want to steal the limelight from Arthur Coburn in whose electorate the bridge was. But the desire to ridicule the Gair government in the eyes of northerners proved stronger than his sense of chivalry, for he had long been convinced that ridicule was the most devastating of all weapons against one's enemies. So he hopped on the morning rail motor to Ayr and made himself as conspicuous as possible when he got there ("you might say dropping poison bait all along the way"), had morning tea with Arthur Coburn and persuaded him to drive Tom down to the bridge, "just for a lark". By the time they got there, a whole cortège of cars was behind them and there were even several pairs of binoculars trained on them. Then, when they reached the end of the bridge, Tom got out and, very seriously, with great ostentation, hand-waving, gesticulating and careful measuring of steps, positioned Coburn on one side of the roadway ("and I thought he would spoil it because he was just about wetting his pants from trying to keep a straight face") and solemnly took up his own position on the other side of the roadway. Then they got back into Coburn's car, drove off, and that afternoon Tom got the rail motor back to Townsville. The only other train back to Ayr that day was the "Sunlander", and that night it crossed the Burdekin bridge festooned with police in case Tom had returned on it to go ahead with the "opening". According to Tom, Gair was "a pompous fellow who used to let things like that affect him very much", and when he did open the bridge a few weeks later, instead of ignoring Tom, "which he should have done, most of his official opening speech was about 'loud-mouthed blatherskites' and that sort of thing".

Of course that suited Tom down to the ground; he knew that for the second time north Queenslanders were laughing with him. To Tom, "Gair should have known better, because in politics if you're ever going to say anything about anybody you've got to name him and shout his name as loudly as you can; if you don't, and resort to innuendos, you lose face because everyone knows who you're talking about and they think you haven't got the guts to name him."[15]



"Shades of De Groot". Unofficial opening of the "Burd-aiken" bridge (Ian Gall cartoon in the *Courier-Mail*, 1 February 1957.) By courtesy of the *Courier-Mail*.

Tom's histrionics were much appreciated. One admirer even composed a paean in his praise:

We took him from the loco and the yard
And sent him down to Brisbane as our rep,
We told him he would have to work darned hard
And warned him that he'd need to watch his step.
But he wasn't long before he found his feet,
And started asking Ministers for grants.
They found him pertinacious,
And disposed to be ungracious,
And very like some ants inside their pants!

Oh Tommy, Tommy Aikens,
You're a lively kind of card.
You are always after something,
And you go for it darned hard.
May you always represent us
In the Parliament down there!
God bless you, Tommy Aikens,
That's the dinkum oil from Ayr!

There's not a job too small for him to do,
As long as someone benefits in Ayr.
He seems to have the energy of two;
And when the whistle blows, he's always there.
He never seems to sleep or take a rest;
He's on the go from dawn till after dark.
He speaks to ev'ry Minister
In accents grim and sinister,
To show his bite is worse than is his bark!

Oh! Tommy, Tommy Aikens.
You're the bloke we've wanted long.
You go for things in earnest,
And you search where they belong.
May your term be lengthy, Thomas,
Is the universal prayer.
God bless you, Tommy Aikens,
Is the daily cry at Ayr![16]

The anonymous author was so captivated by Tom's charm that he or she appears not to have realized (or wanted to forget) that Ayr had in fact been taken out of Mundingburra by a redrawing of electoral boundaries in 1949.

Popular as Aikens' policy was, he realized that it did not constitute his, or for that matter any other politician's, main strength. If he had any doubts, these were soon dispelled when

NQLP candidates in other northern seats, all running on the same "square go" policy, failed lamentably. The party's major effort came in the 1950 state election when it contested eight seats but only "Pooger" O'Brien in Haughton, the electorate adjoining Aikens' Mundingburra to the south, made an even faintly creditable showing.[17] In the seat of Townsville itself, P.J. Rooney could muster only 471 votes and lost his deposit. After 1956, Aikens was the only NQLP candidate.[18] "A Square go for the North" might be a catchy enough slogan with which to satisfy the people's expectation of a policy, but, reasoned Tom, as a self-proclaimed champion of the little man and in a working-class electorate, it would be the strength of his credentials as a working-class representative that would keep him in parliament.

Therefore, as a socialist, Tom often sounded *plus royaliste que le roi*. If the Labor Party would only implement the socialist plank of its own platform, the need for a Communist Party would disappear.[19] For as long as it did not, however, he would continue his association with the communist member for Bowen, Fred Paterson. "We are here," avowed Tom, "to make the Labor Party the live, vital thing that it was many years ago."[20] The two *enfants terribles* of the Legislative Assembly were in fact the only members of that body to support the long and savage railway strike of 1948.[21] Tom was often most eloquent when defending himself against accusations of disloyalty to the working class:

> I have never been disloyal and I will never be disloyal to the solid core of the Labor Party. You can find me in my hours of what might be termed leisure with the people to whom I belong, the people who sent me here, instructing them, advising them, and educating them to the best of my poor ability. You will not find me in the 19th hole of some swanky golf course sipping whisky and soda and swapping smutty stories with simpering snobs in flash pullovers, plus fours, and tartan socks. Whatever I might do, at least I am honest; and I am honest and sincere with the people I represent.[22]

It was only much later, during the 1960s, that Tom often seemed less a crusader for socialism than the friend of capitalism. But his sympathies never really changed; it was just that, by then, in his estimation, the workers themselves were capitalists. Politics had once impinged on the personal lives of the workers because they did not have enough money to buy the necessities, not to say the amenities, of life. By the 1960s, "Well, you couldn't exactly say that there was a glut of money, but everyone

had a quid; people realized that there was very little difference between the parties of socialism and capitalism; to them it was just a question of Tweedeldum and Tweedledee."[23]

The second professional competence which Tom decided a politician must master, again because the people demanded it, was speech-making. He thought it was the least important of a politician's skills; at the same time it could not be neglected. Indeed, in Aikens the people got an unrivalled virtuoso of the art. To his constituents, "as far as orators go there were only two men in Australia—that was Menzies and Aikens—and Aikens had it on Menzies because he put humour in his speeches."[24] It was in parliament that Tom learned how ephemeral the making of speeches could be. In the first place, he noticed that two fellow Independents, Arthur Coburn and "Bunny" Adair, were stolid and infrequent speakers yet proved durable and secure in their seats. In the second place, as an accomplished practitioner himself, Aikens listened to the debates with more than ordinary attentiveness but found that most of what was said fell on deaf ears.

> They would listen to a fluent speaker like Jack Duggan, for example, and say, "Now there's a speaker if ever there was one", but when you asked them what they thought about his ideas on this or that, you would invariably get the reply, "Oh, I must have missed that bit." So I decided that people have the capacity to remember only little remarks, little phrases, little incidents, and the things most likely to stick in their minds would have to appeal to their sense of humour, their sense of hate, their sense of loyalty—to their emotions, if you like.[25]

It therefore mattered little what Aikens spoke *about*, so long as he thought it "really desirable" and something "on which I could be assured of having public support".[26] What Aikens thought "desirable" correspondended almost exactly with what a working-class representative anywhere might have been expected to espouse.[27] In practically all his parliamentary and extra-parliamentary speeches he was liberal or leftist on economic issues, favouring more welfare state measures, higher wages, better working conditions, improved pensions, and so forth; but on non-economic issues he tended to be less tolerant, more tough-minded.

Another tough-minded and no less garrulous speaker, "Bombshell" Barnes, seemingly went out of his way to antagonize his constituents, and eventually failed as an Independent, in Tom's view "because of his outrageous speeches, anti-Catholic,

anti-Semitic, anti-police, anti-prostitutes, anti-anything, which bore no relation to either the interests or ideas of the majority of his constituents". For Aikens, however, public support was always the touchstone of his rhetoric.[28] He obtained it for some of the most unlikely and exotic of proposals, for example, castration of sexual offenders.

> Of course there was my speech frankly and plainly advocating the castration of sexual offenders against children. There were a lot in the House who were horrified, and I can vividly remember old Davie Gledson getting up and saying, "The honourable Member for Mundingburra wants to use the surgeon's knife on those unfortunate devils who commit sexual acts against children. Well, I don't think he'll get a doctor to do the job." Then, with that remarkable frankness of mine when I want to be frank, I interjected, "I don't want a doctor to do the job; I'll do it myself and I'll get scores and scores of men in North Queensland to hold them down while I do it." Well, the uproar! And the publicity! They screamed, "The man's gone mad. What he's proposing is positively antediluvian." That day I was shunned as though I was a typhoid carrier. But then—and this is the astonishing thing, though not astonishing to me—they went home and had a talk to their wives; and next morning, after the papers came out, they couldn't cope with all the phone calls asking them to congratulate me on what I had said. Back in the House that day everyone was very chastened in spirit, everyone came up to pat me on the shoulder, and everyone said more or less the same thing: "Tom, I don't know where you get your ideas from, but you're a hero among the women folk." I said, "It's not only the women who are on my side; most of the men are too." And just for good measure I added, "You'd know it too if you got off your fat pudgy bottoms, out into the highways and byways and mixed with the ordinary people to find out what they think." There's no doubt though that only an Independent could have said it and got away with it. You see, one of the great failings of party politicians is that they fall over backwards to avoid losing a handful of votes. They don't realize that politics is a question of the majority versus the minority.[29]

Tom's castration speech was also a model of his rhetorical style. An exordium asserts his extensive private study of the matter and elevates his knowledge above that of the layman; occasionally, he may even hint at sholarship, without ever actually claiming it, though he may well have tapped the views of men around him more expert than himself and perhaps even authoritative; there then follows a lucid and fairly plausible summary of the state of man's knowledge of the problem, peppered with the tendentious interpolations of an intelligent man-in-the-street

(and by extension, if not explicitly, castigating the experts for their confusion or "lack of worldly knowledge"); the peroration begins early in order to re-engage the listener's attention (which, after all, has already been overtaxed) and is a kaleidoscope of side issues, more or less relevant, of analogy, common sense, whimsicality and hyperbole; the speaker finally sits down, reassuring his listeners that what they have just heard is "sensible" (with expert testimonial, to boot) and in the certain knowledge that some of what he has said, but particularly the way he has said it, will be remembered.

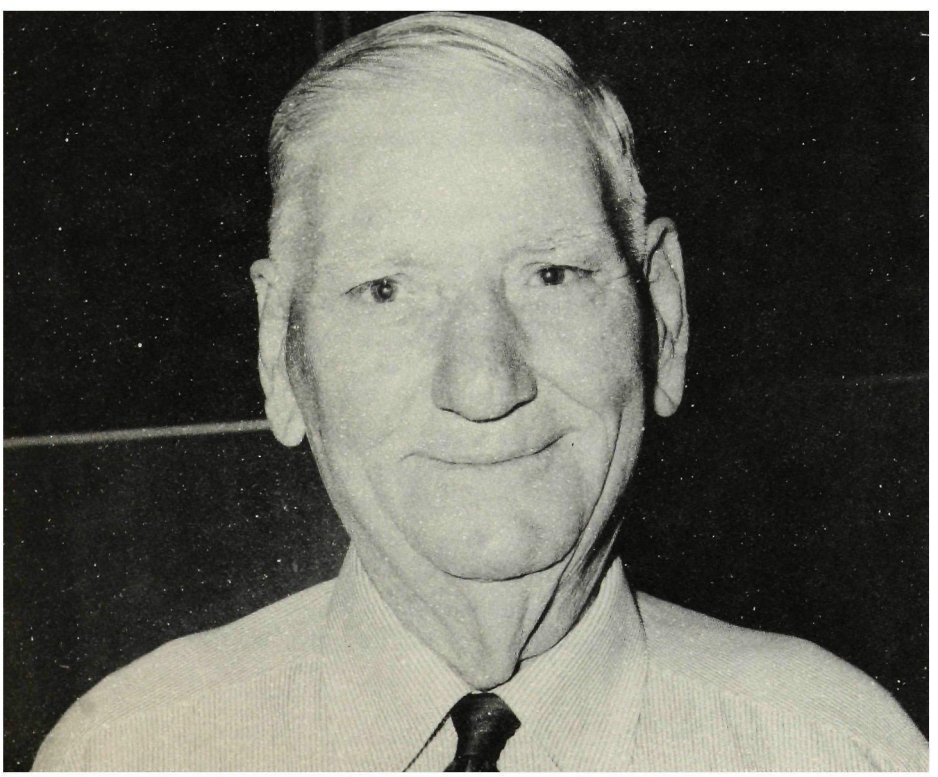
Tom dubbed Parliament House the "Wailing Wall", not for the apparent reason that speaking in it resembled nothing so much as haranguing a stone wall, nor even because most of an MP's mail consisted of wet-eyed supplications, but because many of his colleagues found Tom an oracle of the public's most intimate thoughts and feelings. Tom saw his job, first and foremost, as being a representative of the little people, which entailed mixing with them, tapping their ideas, saying the things that ought to be said in their interest. After the castration controversy, it became clear that Tom did indeed have the ear of many of the little people; it might therefore be useful to ask him which way the popular wind was blowing before flying any political kite. Moreover, it seemed expedient to find out what Tom would himself say on this or that issue because the press invariably picked up his rococo rantings. If he happened to ridicule or denounce a particular proposal, it was often just that little bit harder to get if off the ground. Tom quickly learned that a politician's most hideous nightmare was of public criticism and exposure. Last but not least, winning over Tom might be an effective alternative means of circumventing frustrations and disappointments in the party room. If Caucus stupidly rejected what any sensible man must see as a brilliant argument, what better way of having it aired than through the medium of an Independent?

> Look here, Tom, this plan of mine had a lot of sympathy and support in Caucus, but it didn't get the ministerial backing it should have. Do you think it might be a good idea if you brought it up in the House? Of course, don't mention this to anyone else.

"Naturally", said Tom, smiling beatifically.

A steady stream of honourable members thus beat a well-worn path to Tom's welcoming and always open door, some brazenly, some furiously, some nervously, some curiously, all conspiratorially. "Have you ever seen a kitchen cockroach?" said

The Broom Cupboard. Tom's office in Parliament.



Tom smiling beatifically.

Tom in disrespectful amusement, "he'll come out from under a cupboard, run a little way in one direction, stop and look at you, then dart back if he thinks you're looking at him. Well, the corridor outside my office in Parliament House is just like that."[30]

The parliamentary image of himself that Tom set out deliberately to cultivate was that of a man who would fight the battles of the little man, who knew evil and corruption when he saw it and fearlessly exposed it. He knew that he had no power except in the negative sense that some might fear the lash of his tongue. His good friend, Arthur Coburn, member for Burdekin, school-masterly and earnest, used often to despair that an Independent could ever accomplish anything "except expose things that are really quite worthless".[31] Tom was never troubled by such doubts. "Nonsense," he would say in reply,

> is there anything more worthy, more noble than acquainting the people truthfully with what is really going on behind all the persiflage, the bombast and the mediaeval mumbo-jumbo of a parliament? If you give the people information, not conceal it from them, they will make their wishes known and governments will act accordingly. That is the role of an Independent in parliament.[32]

14

At the Parish Pump

In Townsville, Aikens continued to build on his reputation of personal honesty and unrestrained advocacy of anything he considered to be right and just. His tongue lashed out, though often hastily and unfairly, at any manifestation of greed, cupidity and hypocrisy in the society around him. "There is nothing I like better than a rogue, or even the worst kind of villain," he confessed impishly, "you get a lot of fun out of just watching them." Indeed most of Aikens' speeches which did not merely reflect the political, economic and social predilections and prejudices of his constituents fell into one other identifiable category—the apparently disinterested and non-partisan exposé of the foibles and peccadilloes of party politicians and others in high places in the community.

A surprisingly large number of people find it "infuriatingly difficult" to define what "socialism" means to a man bred in the traditions of the Australian labour movement. Perhaps the most acute observation is this:

> . . . socialists are essentially the people who are most dissatisfied with the structure of wealth, power, prestige and values and who wish to see them altered most fundamentally. They want to see different people at the top and different values respected. . . . They want to hurt, weaken and humiliate the safe, strong and proud men —to say nothing of the women—at the head of Australian society and to exalt others in their place.[1]

Thus Tom's favourite Aunt Sallys were doctors, lawyers and academics, and he calculatingly knew that whatever he said about them was likely to attract a few headlines without losing many votes among the "little" people; indeed, if what he said contained the tiniest scintilla of truth, he would very probably gain some. One of his most fancied quotations was attributable to Lord Brougham: "A lawyer is a legal gentleman who will

protect your estate against your legal enemies, and in the process will take it for himself." Doctors fared no better. At the Strand opening of the children's playground dedicated to one of Townsville's most eminent citizens, Sister Elizabeth Kenny, Tom flayed the profession mercilessly. "It would make your blood boil," he said, "if I told you of the attacks which were made on Sister Kenny and of the despicable meanness of her enemies towards her. Sister Kenny would have been hailed by the medical profession if she had invented a serum which could be administered for a large fee. She would then have been acclaimed as a great woman."[2]

Aikens' especial *bêtes noires* were perfidy and skulduggery, and he eagerly assumed the role of custodian of the public conscience (and sometimes guardian of its morals). He might say with a mixture of sincerity and cynicism,

> I can honestly say this, that in all my years of public life I have never said anything about anyone which I have known to be wholly untrue at the time. It may not have been all the truth, and what I did say may not have accorded with the highest principles of British justice, but if it is not a politician who has the right, duty and privilege—to use that word in the sense it ought to be used —to root out corruption, whose is it? In a democracy, if there is a stink in the air, it is better for all concerned that it should be cleared. So I have taken my grain of truth and said, "I say this about you; you disprove it".[3]

Naturally, many did not take kindly at all to what Tom said about them under parliamentary privilege. "When he gets up in this Chamber," said one honourable gentleman whose patience Tom had tried, "and prattles about his loyalty to the labour movement, his loyalty and mateship with decent men, I for one am not prepared to believe in his sincerity. He is a great opportunist, he goes out and whips up the flames of hell against decent people."[4] On another occasion, Ned Hanlon could not contain his anger: "This business of [his] getting up here and slandering everybody in the country whom he does not like is getting a bit tiresome."[5] Certainly it was Tom's least endearing trait, if by no means his greatest weakness politically. But he always tended to listen too sympathetically and uncritically to the special pleading of the "wronged", to espouse "causes" too rashly, to exaggerate mere accuracy until in his eyes it assumed the burning proportions of truth, to plunge recklessly into the middle of a fray, to magnify or misinterpret the real essence of an issue.

Tom never liked universities for two reasons. The *avant-garde* bohemianism of noisy and licentious undergraduates offended the conservative and puritanical instincts of one with a provincial and working-class background. As well, Tom's personal feelings about education were ambivalent. On the one hand, he venerated it like any worker whose greatest fear was that his children would be less educated than himself; on the other hand, as one who loved knowledge but was self-taught, Tom envied and resented the dons whose opportunities, if not abilities, had been greater than his.

In a typical attack, in 1963, Tom accused a distinguished senior academic of the University College of Townsville of perpetrating a "medical confidence trick". The academic, a highly qualified consultant psychologist with a doctorate in psychology, had been accepting fee patients with the full knowledge and indeed encouragement of both the university and the medical fraternity. However, one of his patients had become "disillusioned", according to Tom, when told by his insurers that the psychologist was not a "qualified medical practitioner" within the technical and legal meaning of health insurance, and that he was therefore ineligible to claim benefit under the terms of his own insurance. To Tom, it was "the most serious thing that has happened in this field in Townsville". The psychologist disagreed. Like any reputable professional person he assumed that no further elucidation of his qualifications was necessary to anyone who voluntarily sought his services. Even less did he consider it necessary, or appropriate, to explain to a patient the recondite subtleties of medical insurance that differentiated between a clinical psychologist with a PhD who could more properly use the title "Dr" than practically any other "doctor" in Townsville but who was still not a "medical practitioner", and others possessing Bachelor degrees who had no inherent right to the title but were universally addressed as such and moreover acknowledged as the only "medical practitioners". For his part, Tom had a vague idea that there were some people entitled to be addressed as "Dr" who were not medical practitioners (there was one who conducted a music lovers' hour on the radio), but he knew that most people would not know that. He could easily have checked his facts with the psychologist, but that was not Tom's style and he did not bother. After all, there was undoubtedly a headline, and the academic was one of the "safe, strong and proud" men whom Tom had no compunctions about traducing.[6]

Aikens' exposés were disinterested to the extent that they were almost invariably based on snippets of information brought to him by aggrieved or indignant people, "people with an axe to grind or pushing their own wheelbarrow". He made a nice distinction, however, between the two. "People with wheelbarrows are always pushing their own private self-interest, and I have nothing to do with that, but people with axes often deserve to have them ground in the public interest as well as their own."[7] What he said was also non-partisan to the extent that he remained scrupulously careful, when pillorying party politicians, never to aim his barbs at only one side or the other. "One of the main reasons why Independents fail," decided Tom, "is because they cease being independent. 'Bombshell' Barnes, for instance, was only anti-ALP, so they set out to get him and did."[8]

The ALP "got" Barnes the more easily because he eventually did everything that a politician should not do. It was not merely that he had no policy, nor that his antics, at first amusing and even beguiling, appeared more and more as a tiresome and tawdry obsession with publicity for its own sake, nor even that his speeches proved little more than a long litany of vituperation; his cardinal sin, and his downfall, was that he finally paid no heed at all to his constituents. "I put on a few turns," Aikens freely admitted, "but everyone knew that I represented Mundingburra. Frank Barnes never once mentioned the word Bundaberg in all the years I knew him in parliament."[9] By the same token, Aikens, Coburn and Adair retained the loyalty of their electors because they placed personal *representation* ahead of all other political concerns.

To Aikens, "Bunny" Adair was the *ne plus ultra* of Independents: "he rarely spoke in the House, but when he did he used plain words that were quite true and factual; he wouldn't speak at all unless he knew what he was talking about, and even then it would be on something to do with his electorate."[10] Arthur Coburn was cast in the same mould as "Bunny" Adair. To all three, representation meant only one thing: giving personal service to those who asked for it. "You know," observed Tom, "there aren't many people without problems; all we did was to mix with the people, find out their thoughts and get them to unburden themselves. Pretty soon the word gets around and you get snowed under with information which people think might help you or someone else. They know they might need a quid pro quo sometime themselves, and when they do you're usually in a position to give it."[11] Whereas so many politicians wrapped

themselves in a protective cocoon of party politics and propaganda, forgetting who had put them where they were and becoming indolent or conceited, or both, Aikens never once stopped demonstrating that, as a representative, he was a distinct improvement on what both the major parties had to offer.[12]

Aikens' skill in so persuading his constituents was the more noteworthy to the extent that he had no loyal or identifiable "NQLP vote" on which he could draw, nor any active party organization on which he could lean. His vote was overwhelmingly a personal one. By the beginning of the 1960s the NQLP, with a declining membership, had become scarcely more than a group of Aikens' ageing mates who assisted him as best they could with the details and formalities of campaigning. The Standing Committee of the NQLP simply became an *ad hoc* Campaign Committee at election times. It had to recruit and pay extra booth workers on polling day. As Tom entered his sixtieth year there was no longer any thought that the party would survive its leader.

The truth was that, very soon after 1949, when the NQLP reached the apogee of its influence throughout north Queensland —even attempting, though abortively, to establish political bridgeheads all over the province—the party became all but moribund. For a time, it tried to maintain a pretence of political vitality and public acceptability. Municipal teams were actually fielded in 1952, 1955 and 1958. But from 1958 the party was unable to get as many candidates as it would have liked to deploy; indeed in 1955 a full municipal team could only be scraped together by the last-ditch expedient of nominating the party's office-bearers *en bloc*. By 1961 Aikens had to confess failure in his attempts to put together a team of any size, even from outside the party.[13]

Morale, nevertheless, at least among the membership nucleus, long remained high. Other parties must have envied the sort of enthusiasm and devotion that led Vice-President Mick Lennon, on the occasion of the 1956 state election campaign, personally "to cart and erect stalls for booths from late Friday night till late Saturday night";[14] and who could complain about the spirit of a party whose newly formed Ladies' Auxiliary snappily raised £251 but, disdaining party coffers, disposed of it all in a series of charitable gestures?[15] Indeed, the party remained consistently solvent. Throughout the 1950s finances fluctuated between £1000 and £2000, quickly recovering from even the most expensive and exigent of campaigns.[16] The main sources of replenishment were a Melbourne Cup Sweep, collections taken

up at Aikens' regular meetings in the Regent Theatre after each session of the state parliament, and sundry private donations.[17] Not surprisingly, Tom himself was the party's main benefactor.[18]

However, the bold front concealed a demoralizing downward plunge in membership figures, which eventually manifested itself in an increasing preoccupation with trivia and non-issues. A persistent, nagging regret over the schism with the ALP also simmered never very far below the surface of party discussion and concern. Active membership during the 1950s ranged from a high of fourteen in 1956 to a low of five in 1959.[19] The same old faces kept monotonously reappearing as principal office-bearers in what was very much like a game of executive musical chairs. More and more, discussion of public affairs degenerated into unanimous resolutions of confidence in the ability of "our member, Mr. T. Aikens, to deal with the legislation before Parliament".[20] Otherwise, entire meetings might be devoted to argument over the relative merits of numbered marbles as opposed to the "old practice of drawing tickets out of a box" in selecting the winner of the Melbourne Cup Sweep;[21] or to picayune issues of parish-pump importance like the poor state of the roads in Currajong (which were so badly pot-holed that the noisome contents of the night-soil cart often spilled over on to public thoroughfares).[22]

Nor were the last of fissiparous tendencies in the party rooted out with the departure of Hamilton, Corcoran and Illich in 1947; members still spoke of "Labor" in terms of nostalgic affection and of themselves as "Hermit Park Labour" or, even more frequently, the Hermit Park "ALP".[23] Some still clung to the hope of eventual reconciliation; others, less sanguine, were yet obviously prepared to search for an accommodation with the ALP. For his part, Aikens had irrevocably cut the painter with the ALP from at least the time of his maiden speech in parliament. He decided that, where his loyalties were concerned, to shilly-shally would be to court swift political oblivion; no man could serve two masters simultaneously. So his region, the "North", replaced his former party in a new scale of political priorities. But there were others in the NQLP, men like "Pooger" O'Brien, who never lost a sense of pain and void at having been rejected by their class, that is, by the ALP which they saw as its apotheosis. Such men seized every seemly opportunity to reaffirm their "Labor" origins, sentiments and sympathies. Once, on the eve of the 1956 state election, there was a heated exchange between O'Brien, who thought the party should express its support for all official ALP candidates, and

Aikens, who supported the "genuine Northerner" in the neighbouring electorate of Burdekin, his fellow Independent, Arthur Coburn.[24]

O'Brien at length rejoined the ALP after the disastrous events of 1955–1957 which split asunder the ALP right and left wings, among other things arraigning the AWU, the NQLP's original *bête noire*, on the side of what was now ALP left-wing legitimacy.[25] Tom's sympathies were with the ALP, perhaps unwillingly but by no means paradoxically: a man with his radical background found the sectarianism of the Labor Right even more repugnant than the moderate, multi-class gradualism of the old AWU–QCE–Cabinet triumvirate with which he had broken. "I abhor, I detest sectarianism in its every manifestation and relation, irrespective of the particular brand of sectarianism," Tom had said unequivocally. "I believe in the right of any man to worship, and I would gladly die on the doorsteps of any church to give any man the right to enter that church, irrespective of its denomination, but the moment that man drags his church into politics I shall be opposed to him."[26] Indeed, one highly placed notable within the QCE, Jack Schmella, hoped that, by not fielding an official ALP candidate against Tom during the 1957 state election, he might, like "Pooger", be enticed back into the party.[27] That suggestion was discountenanced, however, by the parliamentary wing of the ALP; in any case, Tom's rancour over his earlier treatment at the hands of the QCE still burned, and his uncompromising speeches in parliament had left a legacy of mutual loathing that precluded reconciliation. In the event, Tom found it enormously gratifying just to watch the two Labor factions snarling and clawing at each other like alley cats. "As they say," he came close to crowing, "when rogues fall out honest men get their due, and its the same in politics. When a political party splits down the middle the filth you hear is indescribable, and in 1957 each side tipped the tin quite unscrupulously and unmercifully on the other just as they had done over conscription when I was a lad in Cloncurry."[28]

With the defection of "Pooger" O'Brien, whose stature, popularity and involvement in the NQLP made it at least a two-man enterprise, the party became little more than a vehicle for the procession of Aikens' political concerns. The minutes of the monthly meeting of the NQLP on 31 July 1960 read simply but expressively: "Mr. Aikens stated his policy for the next session of Parliament."[29]

Of course, it was not Aikens' "policy" that kept him in parliament. He stayed there term after term because he identified himself utterly with the hopes and fears of his constituents. In this regard his political instincts were uncanny and unfailing. When parliament was not in session, his people always knew where they could find their representative. Regularly and ritually each morning, he pedalled his ancient bike —the same machine on which he had first become known to Townsvilleans, peddling mattresses for Davies and Aikens—from his home to the city (about 2.4 km), walked up and down Flinders Street talking with anyone, and then proceeded to hold court in a corner of Jimmy Goodwin's barber shop.

Each afternoon from 4 o'clock he received a steady stream of visitors "under the house" in Hermit Park. Most Townsville houses are set high, in the Queensland manner, on stilts, serving the double purpose of providing an air-cooled, well-insulated, downstairs sanctuary from the torrid summer sun, or a haven upstairs from destructive, swirling flood waters; "under the house", which might be open or semi-enclosed, is usually a general purpose sitting, sleeping, garage, workshop or tool-shed area. Tom's office under his house consisted of a solid kitchen table of ancient vintage, the repository of his typewriter, and surrounded by a hollow square of bizarre seating accommodation which included a church pew. A cracked picture hung from one of the upstairs' bearers, a naked bulb illuminated the gathering evening gloom, and a hammock hung invitingly above a cool, bare concrete floor.

No matter how tiny or trivial his visitors' problems, Tom Aikens, M.L.A., listened patiently and sympathetically, promised to help, bestowed a patriarchal benison, and sent them away smiling, secure and proud. It was common knowledge that dozens of statutory amendments "benefitting the little man" were directly due to the parliamentary representations of the member for Mundingburra. Tom not only advised but personally assisted with the myriad, intractable problems of everyday life: how to outwit the tax man, how to plumb the intricacies of a pension application, how to subdue a combative neighbour, how to ameliorate an unjust, bureaucratic property valuation,[30] how to visit a relative in a leper colony,[31] how to vote on Saturdays if one's religion (Seventh Day Adventism) forbade it.[32] Over the years he found that his personal service had become a "Frankenstein's monster" demanding his constant attendance and attention, forcing him to lead a life of "boring and almost unendurable respectability". Whenever he went to parliament,

Off to work. Photo by courtesy of the *Townsville Daily Bulletin.*

which might just as well have been, for all a great many of his constituents cared (or even knew), in Canberra or Coonabarabran, the monster fretted until his return.

After each parliamentary session Tom "reported" to his people at meetings in the Regent Theatre, Hermit Park, a cavernous suburban cinema which, like most others in Townsville, boasted rows of canvas, deck-chair seats on a bare concrete floor, cracked fibro and lattice-work walls, and half-a-dozen ceiling fans churning slowly and futilely about six metres above the heads of the sweating audience.[33] These solo performances were invariably well attended; Tom's good-humoured digs at the sanctity of the parliamentary institution and the integrity of his fellow politicians always called forth howls of delighted laughter. Last session, Tom told his expectant listeners, he had told the bewigged Speaker, "from the shoulders down you're not a bad specimen of humanity, but from the shoulders up you look like a mangy cattle dog". The Premier was so narrow minded that he could "look through a key-hole with both eyes". The Leader of the Opposition always spoke "with his brain in neutral and his tongue in top gear". Most of the politicians in Brisbane were so silly "they thought that storks brought white babies and native companions the black ones".

His "reports", indeed his actual campaign speeches, were merely restatements in broad terms of what he had achieved, that is to say, said, in the last session and what he hoped to achieve in the next. Of course, everyone knows that Tom could not have built the Burdekin bridge with his bare hands, and he never actually claims that he did; but since it was common knowledge that he "shames and blackmails" Ministers of the Crown, one could be forgiven for thinking that perhaps the bridge might not have been built if Tom Aikens had not actually been in parliament. After all, everyone knew that Tom had frightened the government into building a fence around the Currajong State School, by threatening to collect a kerosene tin full of cow manure, maggots and blow-flies from under the school and depositing it as evidence on the table of the House.[34]

Tom also had the knack of making the best of windfall publicity. Traditionally, sitting members in the Queensland parliament, even members of the Opposition, were the first to be notified once official approval had been given for the expenditure of state moneys in their electorates. Tom had a good press in Townsville because he always included the *Bulletin* office in his Flinders Street peregrinations, and never failed to provide a few choice morsels of inside information about the machin-

ations of politicians. The "Bully" in turn not only never failed to record Tom's parliamentary triumphs, however small, but also seemed to attribute to him much that could not by any stretch of the imagination be the result of Tom's endeavours. Scarcely a week went by, nonetheless, without the publication of yet another "achievement" due to the superhuman efforts of the member for Mundingburra. For example,

> Mr. T. Aikens, M.L.A., has been advised by the Minister for Works and Housing that, following his personal representations in the matter Executive Council approval has been given for the acquisition of additional land for school purposes at the Oonoonba State School, such land described as Lot 2 on Registered Plan No. 28752, County of Elphinstone, Parish of Stuart, containing an area of 43 perches.

It was the same with every bridge across a creek, every bed in the General Hospital, every paling on a public fence.

Apart from having a policy that swelled local pride, making speeches that reverberated across the state and, most importantly, giving more time to his constituents than any other member of parliament, there was one other essential technique in which, Tom decided, the politician must be proficient—campaigning. It was not terribly important; it required only the intermittent attention of the politician. Indeed, Tom thought that the formal election campaign was little more than an embellishment, sometimes even an impediment, to politics which rested on sustained representation. But it, too, was expected. To the people, it was the liturgy of politics, and even to the politician it served the purpose—like a priest's celebration of Holy Communion, a surgeon's operation or a barrister's plea—of epitomizing his talents and publicly attesting his professional competence. Not surprisingly, Aikens conducted his campaigns with extraordinary versatility and panache.

15

The Compleat Politician

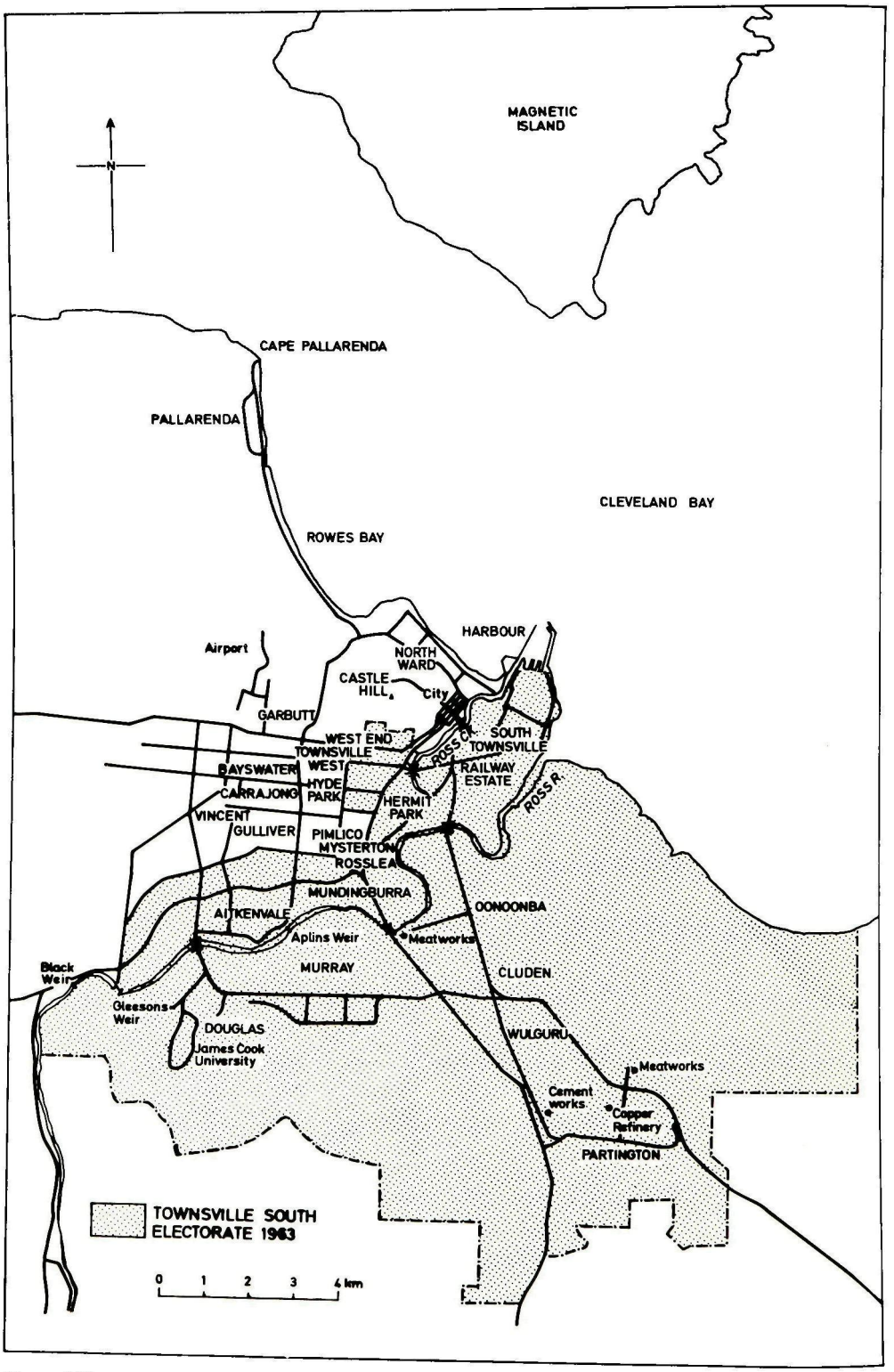
Until the completion of the new Burdekin bridge in 1957, north Queensland remained a "frontier of the future".[1] Then development came so swiftly that, by the early 1960s, even southerners were attempting to define a new mood of optimism in the north as "something new in the concept of development—the coming of the 'sophisticated frontier'."[2] Politicians wintering in the north still from sheer habit intoned tiredly and innocuously about the north's "potential", just as they had been doing for nearly a century, but for the first time the mouthed platitude was beginning to correspond with social and economic reality. The opening of new and significant industry in Townsville, the rebuilding of the western railway to the mines of Mount Isa, the carefully phased but steady accretion of mineral wealth in that desert city, the swelling of population after generations of relative stagnation, the establishment of a university college and a pastoral laboratory of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization, the achievement of significant breakthroughs in pasture improvement, and last but by no means least, the sealing of the main trunk highway to Brisbane—all were indicative of a northern economic renaissance. There was a feeling abroad, inchoate but widespread, that prosperity lay just around the corner. The 1963 state election in Townsville took place against this backdrop of actual economic growth and burgeoning hopes for the fulfilment of a long-awaited destiny. It was one of the most successful and satisfying elections that Tom Aikens ever fought. It was one in which he deployed with consummate skill every strategem and technique of political survival that more than thirty years of elected office, nineteen of them in the state legislature, had taught him.

Electorally, the city and suburbs of Townsville were divided into two constituencies, Townsville North and Townsville South. The old Mundingburra electorate, Tom's fief, had been redrawn

and renamed Townsville South in 1958. Since there were no areas of high population density in Townsville, the boundary between the two electorates roughly bisected city and suburbs. The main business area lay just inside the southern extremity (Ross Creek) of Townsville North, and a fair proportion of Townsville's light industry was scattered throughout the electorate. Townsville South incorporated the fringes of the city's business area (from the Causeway to West End) and the other half of the city's light industrial establishments. Light industry then consisted of a tin-can factory, a carton factory, brick and concrete masonry works, glass works, small-ship building, plywood and sawmilling, paint manufacture, battery manufacture, and a small processed food industry. Large-scale industry, apart from the bulk loading of raw sugar, included two export meat-works at Ross River and Alligator Creek, lime and cement works, copper refining, workshops and carriage-building for the Great Northern division of the Queensland Railways, engineering works and foundries.

Although Townsville South contained all of the city's heavy, that is, large-scale, industry, the electorate was not predominantly "industrial" in character in the sense of being either densely populated or militantly working-class. Indeed, no town with as many as 80 per cent of its dwellings privately owned was ever likely to fit into such a category. To the contrary, the composition of Townsville's population was remarkable, not so much for its proletarian character as for its striking economic homogeneity.

That is not to suggest that Townsville was a "classless" society in the sense that, outside Aikens' electorate, its electoral behaviour deviated markedly from the usual pattern of class voting in other Australian cities. It is to suggest, however, that the "predominant tone of the community" was not merely "blue-collar" rather than "white-collar" but one in which citizens' perceptions of class differences were decidedly less sharp. Right-wing voters in Townsville were "much more likely to identify with the working class than has been reported in other Australian studies"; there was a remarkable uniformity "internally within suburbs in respect to such factors as house values and occupational distribution"; and the relative absence of extremes between rich and poor led to fewer differences between suburbs.[3] Not even the most avid of status-seekers in the plush Yarrawonga quarter of North Ward would claim that he lived in Townsville's Toorak (though he might indignantly deny that Yarrawonga was in North Ward).



Map of Townsville city and suburbs, showing the Townsville South electorate in 1963. Cartography by courtesy of Department of Geography, James Cook University of North Queensland.

Where differences in economic function or the vicissitudes of seasonal unemployment peculiar to the region had in fact tended towards the emergence of a managerial group on the one hand, and a relatively depressed labour force on the other, the tendency overall had been so slight, and the geographic dispersal of both groups so pronounced, that the quintessential "working-class" character of both electorates had never been impaired. There was only one suburb in Townsville, North Ward, which had acquired even a faint social stigma, in working-class eyes, of "being where the swells live", but even so its houses were hardly more pretentious than those in any other part of Townsville.

Townsville North consistently sent an ALP man to state parliament. The Country–Liberal government's redistribution of electoral boundaries in 1958 was obviously designed to transform this particular electorate into a non-Labor seat: the boundary between Townsville North and Townsville South veered crazily through the suburbs, excluding from the former such redoubtable Labor strongholds as West End and including such likely "Tory pockets" as Mysterton Estate. But the gerrymander was not successful. According to Aikens, the Tories, after only two years in office, were as yet mere babes-in-the-wood in the art of political chicanery, compared with the ALP after forty years; they completely lacked the brilliance and finesse of, say, the Hanlon government whose electoral redistribution in 1949 had been a *tour de force* "of such calculating and cynical deviousness as to make Cesare Borgia seem like a fumbling incompetent".[4]

The position in Townsville South was very much the same as in Townsville North. Suburbs like South Townsville, Railway Estate and Hermit Park—old and staunchly working-class—clustered around the railway yards and workshops. Stuart and Wulguru served the new industrial complex based on Mount Isa Mines' copper refinery. Mundingburra and Rising Sun, once where Townsville ended, had engendered a crop of lusty offspring in Gulliver, Pimlico, Aitkenvale—all new, even if not lavish; and bright, if not affluent; interlaced with streets of modern, low-set, "southern" homes—politically precocious, one might have thought. But no, they were all loyal and dutifully attentive to the counsel of sage old "Townsville Tom".

Aikens' only challenger in the 1963 campaign was the ALP nominee, Arthur James Trower. It had long been said locally, not without reason, that the Country–Liberal government had given up contesting Townsville South because it feared that the repercussions of doing so would be felt in the neighbouring electorate of Townsville North—to the government's detriment.

Aikens had the reputation of "training his guns impartially on government and Opposition alike, and the explosion is often loud enough to be heard from one end of the State to the other". Therefore, while the government retained some hope of winning Townsville North, its policy of "letting sleeping dogs lie" in Townsville South shrewdly brought in a bonus: Aikens was content to aim only at the ALP, which had the effect not only of damaging ALP chances in Townsville North but also indirectly of assisting the Liberal candidate.

Born in Innisfail on 22 February 1924, Trower moved to Townsville as a boy, finished his formal education after only a year in high school, and began to serve an apprenticeship as a rotary printing machinist on the *Bulletin*.[5] He enlisted in the army shortly after his eighteenth birthday and was discharged in June 1946 after serving the honourable stint of an ordinary soldier. While completing his apprenticeship in civilian life, he joined the Printing Industry Employees' Union and subsequently held all offices in the local sub-branch. Since 1956 he had been Secretary–Treasurer of the Currajong branch of the ALP. His career, in a word, was scarcely more distinguished than that of a million other Australians, and Trower was the first to admit it. Here was a man whom no one would have thought "impressive" but who at the same time could not fail to leave an impression of unassuming modesty, unimpeachable integrity, quiet and hard-working dedication to family, job and party. To his electors, Trower was "a mighty bloke". To his party, a submissive rather than creative intelligence was no disqualification for the immense task it had assigned him, for no mere man was going to unseat Tom Aikens. On the other hand, the combination of an efficient machine, a faultless plan of operations, unrelenting physical hard work, and a massive barrage of propaganda might just do the trick. It was no disparagement of Trower to say that the ALP campaign was infinitely more important than its candidate. He rarely attempted to project himself as anything more than the mouthpiece of a policy, and this was as much a reflection of the candidate's own self-effacing ideas about his role in the party as it was his party's realization of its own essential strategy. Still, Trower was ready to have a go at the sitting member, if only because "no-one else had the guts to do it". Since his own branch was part of the Townsville North electorate, he was nominated by the South Townsville branch of the ALP and received the party's endorsement without pre-selection.

From the outset, the ALP campaign was organized with the kind of thoroughness in scope and precision in detail that could only be described as military. It bore certain unique features. First, it was probably the most expensive campaign waged in the entire state. Candidates and campaign managers on both sides were reluctant to divulge exact details of campaign funding. The reticence was no doubt partly due to some of the artful methods of soliciting finance which supplemented normal sources of support. For example, there were unofficial raffles (called "Goose Clubs") conducted in hotel bars, and official raffles conducted by party "fronts" (such as a mythical Australian Rules Football Club in a city where Aussie Rules was, if anything, rather less popular than Rugby League in Melbourne). Nevertheless, the joint ALP campaign for Townsville North and Townsville South cost in the vicinity of £2500, of which approximately half was contributed by party branches. The cost of the NQLP campaign in Townsville South was somewhat less than half that amount (about £1100). A second unprecedented feature of the ALP campaign was that its organization in Townsville South was completely merged with that of the campaign in Townsville North. The Joint Campaign Committee met once a month and consisted of three delegates from each of the party's branches, as well as the two candidates. There was a director and an assistant director for the campaign in each electorate. The detailed work of actual campaigning was carried out by an Executive Campaign Committee comprising the two candidates, the two directors, the two assistant directors, and not more than one or two of the delegates to the joint committee. No effort, or even expense, was to be spared in the attempt to defeat Aikens.[6]

In the initial stages of the ALP campaign, party workers remarked jocularly to one another: "if we don't get old Tom this time, he'll be there until he dies." The confident tones left no one in doubt that such a contingency, because it was so ridiculously extreme, could never possibly eventuate. The first advertisement launching the ALP campaign was placed in the *Bulletin* on 8 September 1962—nine months before election day. Only three weeks after that, on 29 September, Trower stomped to his first street corner.

Operational headquarters were "under the house" at the candidate's home. Trower, an avid bush carpenter, had partitioned off a campaign office. Paint, placards, loudspeakers were spread about in happy confusion. A huge map of Townsville was

hinged underneath the living-room floor so that it swung down at a convenient angle for concentrated plotting. It was a colourful sight, dotted with multi-coloured thumb tacks, each colour representing a particular *point d'appui* in the campaign to convince or seduce the voter. The red ones indicated the fences or sides of houses which displayed personal posters; the green ones located party placards; yellow tacks marked the venues of the extended Saturday morning meetings; blue, the proposed "whistle stops". Some selected areas were completely cordoned off for direct door-to-door canvassing by the candidate himself. Every voter in Townsville would come within sight or earshot of the party's message.

The campaign began to gather momentum in the new year. From 12 January 1963 Trower was joined by the ALP incumbent in Townsville North, Percy Tucker, who was himself under strong pressure.[7] The Saturday morning meetings were now stepped up to one in each electorate, with both candidates participating, occasionally with the help of the local ALP federal member for Herbert, Ernie Harding, who also worked in close liaison with the Joint Campaign Committee. Five-minute radio broadcasts on the city's principal commercial station, 4TO, began on 19 January and continued until the end of the campaign on a regular Saturday, 5.45 p.m. time slot. Some five hundred posters which had been kept on ice till the end of the "Wet" began to appear at predetermined points all over the town at the end of February.[8] The rains persisted through March and soon many of the posters looked limp and forlorn, their vivid reds streaking queazily across a jet-black background; but they were quickly repaired or replaced. Simultaneously, during the first week of March, the candidates, always together now, took their loudspeakers into the suburbs at 5.15 p.m. every afternoon except Fridays. These meetings also continued until 1 June. If the voters were yet affected by the party's earnest appeals, they managed to conceal their interest effectively. The street-corner meetings were lucky to attract even a handful of self-conscious stalwarts; apart from these, there were only the curious small boys who temporarily suspended a game of marbles. Usually the candidates merely directed their speakers at random to three points of the compass and spoke hopefully to the other, although it is true that, to the trained eye, a few curtains could be seen to ruffle suspiciously and occasionally even a window was seen to open.

By 20 March the campaign had clearly begun to assume classic proportions. Ten-second slides appeared on television and

at the only drive-in cinema. Television had only recently begun in Townsville and was still absent from many homes; there was only one channel in operation. Party literature now added to the Saturday morning litter of suburban footpaths and gutters. These consisted of a QCE dodger, with the name of the local candidate overprinted in the top right-hand corner, promising a "destination of prosperity" for ALP voters in 1963, and a four-page leaflet featuring a personal appeal from Trower, with a frontispiece of himself, his wife and their two children knocking at the door of a house and asking, "May we come in?". Aikens' prompt and typical retort was that he preferred to be judged on his "ability" rather than his "fertility". Saturday shoppers would also find a small card thrust into their hands. One side was a calendar; the obverse asked electors to "vote ALP in '63", over a small picture of the candidate, and gave the names and addresses of party insiders from whom "all information concerning electoral matters" could be obtained. Newspaper advertisements similarly exhorted postal and absentee voters to contact certain key personnel, notably the candidate himself, who would personally assist in the completion of this formality.

During all this time Townsville was playing host to a steady stream of ALP notables from the south. Frank Crean, Manfred Cross, Bill Hayden, Pat Hanlon, Senators Dittmer and McKenna, and of course the state party leader, John Duggan himself, all appeared in the electorate at various times. In order to provide the visitors with an appropriate demonstration of party vigour, solidarity and confidence, even the obsolescent and generally disdained hall meeting was resurrected on four occasions. However, the visits were usually of brief duration and calculated more to exalt the party's image than to have any direct influence on the local campaign. Indeed, simply because the campaign machinery in Townsville was so obviously well oiled, they were invariably shunted off to the neighbouring country electorates of Hinchinbrook, Flinders and Burdekin where the mere presence of a "name" was likely to have greater immediate impact. Only the party leader, John Duggan, was asked to make a five-minute television appearance.

The pace which the candidates set in the closing weeks of the campaign can only be described as killing. Every form of communication was continued; but in addition the television slides were now supplemented by the weekly talks of both candidates. Each Friday, for five weeks, Trower and Tucker enjoined a captive audience, on the lone television channel, to elect an ALP government. In the last week they added two

individual appearances to a final joint appeal. For ten days, the "whistle stops" were increased to an exhausting average of twenty-five *daily*. Another QCE dodger appeared, this time in technicolour, with three beaming housewives "all agreeing on voting ALP in '63" from the floor of a supermarket which was unmistakably (and therefore rather ambiguously) abundant; inside, an equally ebullient John Duggan stood beside the overprinted name of Trower. This indefatigable candidate now modestly wound up his campaign with a door-knocking canvass in which he completely covered the two suburbs of Wulguru and West End.

Throughout the campaign, both ALP candidates' speeches continually returned to the theme of unemployment. Compared with it, all other questions paled into insignificance. The usual catchcries were that unemployment in Queensland was "higher than the national average" and that "two out of every five unemployed were under the age of 21". If unemployment were to become of vital importance to Labor in winning the election, it had no better chance of success than in north Queensland. Seasonal unemployment had always been the bane of the land, particularly in the meat industry, which was not only an important prop of Townsville's economy but a useful barometer of its day-to-day prosperity. As well, there had been no spectacular expansion of industry of a kind which would have readily absorbed a significant increase in the population of school leavers. Railwaymen, too, were obviously troubled by the Country–Liberal government's frequently stated intention of streamlining railway operations, which was invariably interpreted in Labor quarters as a policy of "wrapping up the railways". Yet in spite of all this, there was to be no marked movement against the government.

In Townsville, the ALP's utter failure to make any political leeway out of the unemployment issue was attributable to two factors. In the first place, the election was held in June. Traditionally, governments in Queensland avoided electioneering during the first four months of the year on the grounds of the recurrent problem of seasonal unemployment—a wise decision, for the meat and sugar industries lay dormant, and the onset of the summer "Wet" meant a certain degree of dislocation both to industry and to the works programme of local authorities. By May 1963, however, employment in the two basic industries was at a high level, with the prospect of bumper seasons ahead, and there was no evidence to suggest that the annual take-up of labour was later or more sluggish than in previous years.[9]

In the second place, although it appeared true that a larger number of school leavers than usual were in the market for employment, again by May 1963 there were actually very few still without a job. Commonwealth Employment Service officials were emphatic in referring to the general labour situation in all sections of industry and the trades as "bright", though they did concede that some school leavers were not employed in jobs of their "first choice". However, ALP stalwarts remained adamant that the unemployment issue dominated the campaign for no other reason than that it had reached chronic proportions: "one of me mate's cousins was still looking for a job." The faithful, nourishing one another's zeal, thus never moved outside the rarefied atmosphere of their own myth-making.

Arthur Trower, it bears repeating, made no attempt to project himself in any other role than that of representative of a party which offered a progressive and positive policy. For precisely this reason his speeches were, almost without exception, aimed at the Country–Liberal government and not at his actual opponent, Tom Aikens whom he was content to portray (though with circumspection and a good deal of respect) as an Independent who had no policy and could never be a part of any government:

> My opponent at the coming election, the self-styled "Townsville Tom" has seen fit to refer to me as an ALP party hack. No offence is taken. In the first place I am proud to be a member of the Australian Labor Party from whose stable many thoroughbreds have emerged. This party stands for social justice and which can and WILL form a Government as different to a one-man party which at the most optimistic can only have a nuisance value—like toothache.[10]

This sort of attack was lacklustre and ineffectual, for Aikens not only took pride in his independence but "paraded" it.[11] To be called a "toothache", to be seen as a "nuisance", especially by the ALP, Tom Aikens regarded not merely as compliments but as personal triumphs.

As a devoted servant of his party, Trower also reacted indignantly against the government's campaign to link the ALP with communism. Normally calm and unruffled, Trower sometimes became visibly agitated in his references to the so-called smear. He hit back defensively: "Nothing makes me madder than being called a communist." Unfortunately, the smear had exactly the effect that the government no doubt intended that it should have. "Unemployment" and Labor's proposals to combat it all too often took second place to impassioned diatribes on the "great and untarnished history" of the ALP, "which

always arrives at its decisions through the great democratic process", and which "has as its basic principle the great idea of Christianity". If he had been Tom Aikens he would have accused the government, and with far greater effect, of being "like a black gin's left leg—neither right nor fair". Needless to say, Trower did not take kindly to Tom's homely aspersions in a similar vein: "If you lie down with flea-bitten dogs, you can't blame the people if they think you've got fleas"; or "If you fly around with crows, nobody is going to think you are a canary." And even though one could not be sure that the ALP was really controlled by Reds, it was hard to disagree with Tom's proposition that its politicians were "human yo-yos dangling at the end of a string" held by someone else, particularly when he put it that way. Nevertheless, Trower ignored the wisecracks, and the campaign on his side was a scrupulously clean one. It could hardly have been otherwise with a man so inherently decent, who so loved his party and so respected his opponent.

While Trower and his cohorts fulminated, Aikens sat back in benign and disinterested amusement, occasionally offering only a sarcastic running commentary on the ALP campaign. His own "opening rally" took place on 17 May, *eight months* after the commencement of the ALP campaign, a full two weeks before polling day, although it is true that he had deigned to place a few newspaper advertisements beginning on 30 March. Only a few weeks before the election and an almost contemptuous few months after the start of the ALP campaign, Tom Aikens chose to elect the citizens of Townsville South to the parliament of the state of Queensland—for that is exactly what his advertisements set out to do and accomplished.

Beginning with the axiom that an appeal to the voter goes first to the belly, second to the heart and never to the mind, Aikens reasoned that the belly was already full. "The worker of today," he announced, "is conscious of a profound struggle —the struggle 'to keep up with the Jones'." Moving on to the second axiom that a citizen's loyalties moved up in ascending order or priority from his belly to his family to his home to his street to his suburb to his town to his region to his state to his nation, Aikens proceeded to deal with each of these succinctly and conclusively. "Townsville honoured!" rang out his first advertisement.[12] If one read the small print it transpired incidentally that this was because someone had written a book or something about Tom Aikens.[13] "Second City!" trumpeted another; and this was because the people of Townsville were wise enough to know, "they had a man in Parliament who was always

on their side and could be relied upon not to weaken, no matter how tough the opposition or how bitter the battle."[14] Naturally, "it was foolish to claim that Tom Aiken was personally responsible for all the remarkable development of our city in recent years. But the fact is. . . ." Another proudly comforted, "Tom Aikens doesn't bob up from nowhere at election time and try to ride into parliament on a party ticket. . . . At the end of every session of parliament he holds public meetings to tell the people to whom alone he is responsible all that went on in parliament, and how he spoke, voted and acted on every measure, and why. He is the ONLY member of parliament in Australia to do this."[15] "Champion of the underdog," it went on modestly, quoting "many fine compliments that had been publicly paid to him," but implying strongly that these were rather tributes to the very electors who had had the good sense to keep sending him back to parliament. Another made "the proud boast that MORE government houses had been built in Townsville than in any other city or town outside Brisbane," because Tom "rolled up his sleeves and kept constantly on the job to get as many houses as he could for Townsville from the few that were granted to places outside Brisbane."[16] Surely only an idiot would doubt that a man of such rare attainments, a veritable paragon among politicians, must also have had a hand in bringing the university to Townsville[17] and the Burdekin bridge to North Queensland.[18] After all, Tom Aikens knew that

> because Townsville was isolated and cut off from markets and supplies, sometimes for weeks at a time, during a Wet season, due to the submersion of the low-level rail bridges over the Burdekin and Houghton [*sic*] rivers, many business men were reluctant to open up industries here. Townsville people too suffered considerable hardships when these hold-ups occurred. Tom's successful battle, with the support of a gallant little band of Free Northlanders, for a high-level bridge over the Burdekin river, is now written into our history. And who has forgotten the popular demand that Tom should perform an Unofficial Opening Ceremony at the bridge? The high-level rail bridge over the Houghton river followed soon after, and our people were spared the annual goods shortages and high prices. But Tom was not satisfied with the removal of our city's isolation by rail. The TWO high level traffic bridges, one at Rooney's and the other at the meatworks, which replaced the ONE low-level bridge over the Ross River, are concrete evidence of Tom's service to Townsville and its people.

Was this political advertisement or historical saga, a testament to sheer human valour? It was all very ungracious indeed

for one spoilsport to suggest that because Tom could not lay claim to the building of the bulk sugar terminal he burned that enormous edifice down.[19] Wait a minute! Its restoration *was* helping to relieve the unemployment problem. The old fox!

There is a very real sense in which Aikens' campaign in 1963, adroit as it was, can be said to have been superfluous. However, to say that people would continue sending him back to parliament until he died is perhaps not to tell the truth. The truth rather is that people will still be voting for him after he dies. That much is already Townsville legend. His campaign, in comparison with Trower's, was hardly more than a token one. But he will always have one; otherwise, he says, "the people will feel that they have been cheated". There were no hall meetings. No literature was printed. No special efforts were made to attract or assist postal voters. There were two half-hour Sunday morning radio talks, four quarter-hour lunch-time talks, and three scatter advertisements daily for two weeks. There were three five-minute television talks.[20] There were eleven street-corner meetings, with audiences ranging from about fifty at the "opening rally" to zero. Then there were the newspaper advertisements, a dozen or so, although mostly never smaller than an arresting 300 mm × 150 mm.

Tom's sense of humour was undoubtedly what his constituents remembered most about his speeches. He reminded them about his ALP opponent in the 1953 state election, Danny Gleeson, who was "not a bad bloke, but fancy sending him down to parliament. When he was at work the other day and opened his crib for lunch, he said, 'Ugh, cheese sandwiches,' and threw them away. He did the same thing the next day. When he did it again on the third day, one of his mates said, 'Come on, Danny, if you don't like cheese sandwiches why don't you ask your wife to put something else on them?' and Danny replied, 'Oh, I couldn't do that—my wife's away and I'm cutting them myself.' " There was also the time when Danny was a doorman at the Kennel Show and Tom spoke to him: "Danny, I can see the fox terriers over there and the spaniels behind them, but where are the labradors?" To which Danny had replied, "Gents out the back, Ladies second door on the left down the passage." Tom did not actually compare Arthur Trower with Danny Gleeson, but . . . One thing he just *had* to compare Tucker and Trower with: they "waddled" around Townsville from street corner to street corner "like ducks eating pollard". ALP radio and television talks began and ended with rhyming political commercials: "Vote ALP in '63 and you will score in '64"; "the

man of the hour—Arthur Trower"; "for a better life in every way vote ALP on election day"; "it fits to a 'T'—Townsville, Tucker, Trower", and so on. Aikens' references to Tucker and Trower as the "Ada and Elsie of TV", and his droll suggestion that the ALP's "nursery rhyme mentality" was hardly suited to the "man's world of politics" somehow made ALP pretensions seem hardly serious. Not only was his rhetorical style deft and assured, but he was also, like Paine, the purveyor of common sense *par excellence*. He set out, and with conspicuous success, to convince his listeners not only that they controlled him, not only that they were the only ones who really knew what was going on in politics, but also that they were the most thoughtful and intelligent voters in the entire nation.

In 1963 Aikens was returned to parliament with a majority of almost 3000 votes in a poll of 14 000. He received 8229 votes to Trower's 5450. This compared with Aikens' 8501 votes to the ALP's W.F. Edmonds' 4216 in the previous election in 1960. At first glance, therefore, it would appear that Trower had indeed made a significant inroad into the Aikens' vote, more than 6 per cent. But this was not really so. In the first place, Edmonds in 1960 had been a weak candidate, already defeated at a federal election and personally unpopular in the ALP, so that he had difficulty in manning his polling booths. He did not even reside in the electorate. The 1960 election was a straight fight between "Brisbane Bill" and "Townsville Tom" in which as many as 500 ALP fringe supporters voted against their candidate. Corroboration of this assessment came later in the 1966 election when Aikens' vote again rose to 9260 and Trower's dropped to 5196, the balance of 194 votes going to a communist candidate.

Trower was liked by ALP supporters, he fought a clean fight and he lived in his city. Throughout the campaign there was a distinct atmosphere in ALP circles of "we-cleaned-up-Menzies (well, almost)-now-we'll-clean-up-Nicklin". It was therefore undoubtedly true that the bandwagon boys, the "be-on-a-winner" fringe element in the ALP which had voted against Edmonds in 1960 wholeheartedly supported Trower in 1963. Trower's was very likely the "true" ALP state vote in Aikens' electorate. By 1966, however, the enthusiasm had worn off and a lot of the marginal votes were pulled back into Aikens' orbit.

The additional, though small, margin of success which Trower achieved in 1963 was probably explicable in terms of two other factors. First, there was a general state-wide improvement in the ALP vote. The 1960 election had been held at the peak of

ELECTORAL DISTRICT OF MUNDINGBURRA (REDISTRIBUTED IN 1958 TO TOWNSVILLE SOUTH)

DETAILS OF POLLING 1944–77

Date of Election	Number on Roll Qualified to Vote	Votes Given to Candidates					Informal Votes	Total Votes	% of Total Votes Polled by *Aikens*
15.4.44	11885	*Aikens* 3658	Coburn 2753	Parsons 179	Pass 763	Tomlins 2930	83	10366	35.2
3.5.47	12689	*Aikens* 4541	Coburn 4296	Parker 2630			67	11534	39.3
29.4.50	8674	*Aikens* 3348	Brankin 2664	Mahony 1889			105	8006	41.8
7.3.53	8840	*Aikens* 4372	Gleeson 2303	Wordsworth 1647			56	8378	52.1
19.5.56	10210	*Aikens* 7296	Brennan 2074				189	9559	76.3
3.8.57	10728	*Aikens* 7488	Mahoney 1920	Evans 564			132	10104	74.1

ELECTORAL DISTRICT OF TOWNSVILLE SOUTH

28.5.60	13863	*Aikens* 8501	Edmonds 4216				223	12940	65.6
7.6.63	14707	*Aikens* 8229	Trower 5450				140	13819	59.5
28.5.66	15840	*Aikens* 9260	Trower 5196	Bishop 194			186	14836	62.4
17.5.69	17035	*Aikens* 8085	Moon 5281	Hurney 1653	Bishop 206		224	15449	58.8
27.5.72	11641	*Aikens* 5500	Wilson 4391	Smith 890			144	10925	50.3
7.12.74	14508	*Aikens* 5881	Wilson 4924	Weber 691	Judge 628		306	12430	47.3
After Allocation of Preferences		6385	4968	771	–				51.3
12.11.77	15466	*Aikens* 6173	Wilson 6621	Milne 623			281	13417	46.0
After Allocation of Preferences		6580	6837						49.0

an economic boom. Immediately after it, the federal government's "credit squeeze" and an apparent anti-Queensland attitude which had even provoked attacks by state Country–Liberal Ministers unquestionably enhanced ALP prospects. Second, though this consideration must weigh far less, there was some restiveness among the high concentration of industrial workers in Townsville immediately before the election. A decision of Judge Ashburner in Melbourne rankled in the breasts of waterside workers. A pay rise to railway clerks, which meant that the lowest paid clerk earned more than the driver of Queensland's crack, trunk-line express, the "Sunlander", made railwaymen conscious of the ever-widening gap between white-collar and blue-shirt workers. Industrial disturbances also spluttered at the meat-works. It was thus no coincidence that the three out of fifteen polling places where Trower led Aikens —McIlwraith Street, Oonoonba and Stuart—were in precisely those suburbs which were contiguous to wharves, railway and meat-works.

In Townsville South there were seven ALP branches: Stuart–Wulguru (1960 active membership, 7; 1963, 40); Oonoonba (43:33); Hermit Park (19:19); Railway Estate (36:36); South Townsville (21:41); Mundingburra (25:39); Aitkenvale (new branch, 29). The ALP candidate defeated Aikens in Stuart and South Townsville (McIlwraith Street) where the most pronounced increases in party membership had occurred, where branch leadership was vigorous, and where actual assistance in the campaign was most actively sustained. In Oonoonba, where Trower also beat Aikens, party membership had shown a marked decline, but branch leadership at the time of the campaign was energetic. Oonoonba was in fact the only branch to adopt the imaginative technique of issuing each voter in the suburb with a card bearing his name and electoral roll number. On the other hand, it was noteworthy that in Wulguru, which was one of the two suburbs where the ALP candidate carried out a door-to-door canvass, a majority of the electors voted for Aikens. It seemed clear that if there were any connection between either enthusiastic branch leadership or actual size of membership and electoral success, it was organizational ability and drive of leadership that provided the key.

Certainly, formal campaigning by the ALP was a sheer waste of time and money. When, as the culmination of a massive campaign, a candidate's door-to-door canvass in West End, always a pillar of support for the ALP in federal elections, elicited nothing but ingratiating promises to vote for the ALP

in a state election, and when on election day that same suburb voted solidly for his opponent, this futility was convincingly underlined. Trower was especially confident of victory in West End. The ALP had printed 20 000 how-to-vote cards compared with Aikens' 15 000 paper slips. Trower himself made frequent rushed trips to replenish supplies at certain polling places. On the floors of the booths the litter of Aikens' "blacks" seemed almost obscured by the preponderance of ALP "reds". But the people voted for Aikens. So far as Wulguru and West End were concerned, two inferences only seemed possible: first, that people were ashamed of being thought disloyal to their party of normal allegiance; second, they were still prepared to vote for the man who represented them ably and conscientiously, in preference to the party ticket. Trower might have done well to listen to Aikens' wily musing at the beginning of the campaign: "The trail of politics is littered with the debris of outworn devices. Plans, policies and concepts have a rate of obsolescence just as does a piece of machinery. They might originally serve appropriate purposes, but they tend to become encrusted with habit and tradition to a point where they actually become deterrents to fresh thinking."

The 1963 state election in Townsville South also taught certain other lessons quite unambiguously: that people who normally never lied about anything cheerfully lied about their intentions on polling day; that people made up their minds about the sitting incumbent even as formal campaigning got under way; that an election campaign accomplished little more than the dissemination of the challenger's name; that people were much more interested in their own welfare than in party politics or party labels—as Tom put it, "beating their joss in bad times and burning incense in the good"; that people who felt their welfare to be secure voted for the man and the government in power. Above all, the election demonstrated that hard-working representation at the grass-roots was the most reliable assurance of permanent political survival and that therefore Tom Aikens could be beaten, but only by Tom Aikens.

16

109th Psalm

Of course, there were other elections during Tom's parliamentary career that were more "important" in a state-wide context than that of 1963—elections which psephologists saw as "vital" in the sense that issues loomed larger or the overall result seemed more in doubt. Even in these cases, however, Tom's victories were never less than decisive. The explanation was simply that "issues" and "policies" did not much matter in his electorate. By far the most important election in Townsville South was that of 1963, because of the magnitude of the local ALP campaign to unseat Tom; no greater effort had been made before nor would be again.

What did matter, of course, in Tom's re-election to parliament over and over again was his high professional skill as a politician. His "policy" reflected the prevailing predisposition of his electorate, which he ascertained by an intuitive sampling of the views of hundreds of voters; his speech-making remained vivid, arresting and widely acknowledged as placing him in the front rank of orators; his representation, which Tom construed as providing service to his electors, was assiduous and never-ending; his campaigning was a perfect model of what the voter expected. To Tom no election was different from any other except that a modicum of fine-tuning of his "policy" was necessary to match the mood of the electorate: his attacks on the ALP would be toned down if its popularity waxed, strident if it waned. The size of his majorities was also a reflection of the same fluctuating popularity.

A dozen or so years and several elections later Tom had passed his seventy-fifth birthday and was still going strong. His features were perhaps a little more gaunt, his gait a shade less steady. Jimmy Goodwin's barber shop was no more, and Tom had moved his city "office" across the street to Coles' cafeteria. But nothing had really changed. He still pedalled into town every morning,

flashing his cherubic grin at every passerby, hailing everyone he knew as he strolled down Flinders Street, refusing to own a brief-case or a cheque book, using the same slick, printable phrases. Nor had he lost his magic touch as a vote-charmer. There were perhaps several reasons, for example, for the declining popularity of the Townsville Citizens' Association aldermanic team in 1967 after eighteen years in office, but none for its total and humiliating demise at the polls—except that Tom Aikens demanded it in an eighteen-minute television talk on election eve. There were similarly a number of reasons why the ALP candidate in the 1972 federal election in Herbert was unlikely to equal the success of other Labor candidates in a year of electoral good fortune for his party, but none why he should suffer the worst defeat of an ALP candidate since the Liberal incumbent had won the seat—except that Tom Aikens advised Townsvilleans, in a twelve-minute television talk on election eve not to vote for him.[1]

In 1971 a redistribution of state electoral district boundaries — the third since Tom had entered parliament—created a third electorate in Townsville and left Tom's seat truncated. Townsville South in fact contracted to its original nucleus around Hermit Park, and Tom lost the spruce outer suburbs whose residents, many of them new arrivals in Townsville, had voted for Tom in the absence of any other non-Labor candidate. Hermit Park was still staunchly working-class, but that part of its solid ALP constituency which had always switched allegiance to Tom in state elections was ageing and diminishing. Notwithstanding these changes, Tom held his seat effortlessly, proving for the umpteenth time his ability to modify normal voting behaviour.

Stories of Tom's drinking still sometimes resurfaced, especially at election times, though invariably to the discomfiture of their purveyors. During the 1972 state campaign an ALP notable from New South Wales was orating on behalf of the local Labor candidate. "When I finish my speech," he said recklessly, "being a good Christian I am going around to the Park hotel to help Tom Aikens out of the gutter. Is there anyone here who will come with me on this mission of mercy?" A man in the crowd raised his hand and the speaker acknowledged him: "Thanks, mate, you're a true Christian. What's your name?" "Tom Aikens", Tom replied to the delight of the audience who promptly laughed the red-faced orator off the platform. During the state campaign in 1974 a far from elderly interjector tried to embarrass Tom at one of his Regent Theatre meetings: "You

expect people to vote for a drunk? Last year you were so rotten outside the Royal Oak it was all me and two of me mates could do to stand you on your feet." "How old are you?" Tom asked quietly. "Thirty-four", replied the victim, "so bloody what?" "Then you must have been an infant Hercules because I gave up the grog in 1944!"

Among laymen and political *cognoscenti* alike the notice Tom attracted was hardly ever ambivalent, whether approving or no. To some, he was at best a "scurrilous old rogue", a "rat", a "hatchet man of Toryism". To others, more charitably, he was "a unique phenomenon in the desert of Queensland politics", or "the last representative in the Australian parliaments of a style of inspired, conscientious, vulgar, 'irresponsible', legislative behaviour that Southerners are apt to assume disappeared with *The Wild Men of Sydney*." But there was really no dichotomy at all. Indeed the distance between breathless radicalism and obdurate conservatism has never been a great one. In Aikens' case, the explanation for his agility in bestriding the gap turns upon two points: first, the natural conservatism, intolerance and tough-mindedness of working-class people on non-economic issues; second, the depth of Aikens' personal bitterness at having been officially banished by the ALP while continuing to receive the unstinted, unofficial approbation of his loyal, in large part working-class, constituency. On the first of these points, the innate conservatism of working-class people has been convincingly demonstrated and may be presumed to hold true for Australian classes.[2] On the second point, Tom's loathing of the ALP is no doubt partially explained in terms of "the characteristic of a downward spiral to the gutter in Labor quarrels", when the rule is "boots-and-all in" and "the wounds inflicted go so deep that they take literally decades to heal".[3] Sometimes they never do.

So Tom was not so much pro-Tory as anti-ALP, which indeed seemed the more obvious for a politican whose only serious opposition at election times came exclusively (after 1953) from the ALP. But he could still speak, look and act like a working man (and certainly convince many of his voters that he was) while at the same time cheerfully burying his hatchet in the ALP. The truth of the matter was that Tom became, to adapt an American analogy, the perfect provincial populist, a grass-roots politician whose views veered with those of the populace from a sometimes millenarian Left to an often obscurantist Right. Everyone, including Tom, loved lower rents, higher pensions, better education, more housing; everyone hated

murderers, rapists, child molesters, drunken drivers and foreigners.

The climax of the public's esteem for Tom Aikens probably came in 1975 when the Mayor of Townsville and a leading surgeon, themselves both members of parliament, offered to nominate him for parliamentary selection as an Australian Senator. To "elevate" him in this way might, Tom thought, be a "fitting farewell". On reflection, however, he decided that his political future would be infinitely more secure in Townsville than in Canberra and he declined the honour. From the vantage point of seventy-five years of age, he still viewed his political future with equanimity. "I am comforted always by the beautiful words of the 23rd Psalm," he quipped with a twinkle in his eye, "and the ALP will no doubt continue to wish upon me the rigours of the 109th."

Two years later, contesting his thirteenth election in state politics, Tom succumbed to these electoral rigours. Rather, Tom Aikens beat Tom Aikens. If advancing years had not quite blurred Tom's memory of his cardinal political precept—"Independents fail when they stop being independent, when they drift to one side or the other"—to many of his electors they clearly had. It was not that his grass-roots representation became any the less tireless or devoted than it always had been. Privately, Tom the representative remained a paragon. Publicly, however, the remorseless chiaroscuro of the television screen lay bare "Tory Tom"—without colour, without nuances, without youth, without history. To the increasingly youthful and newly arrived constituency in a city now suddenly grown to around 100 000 people (and Tom's contemporaries were nearly all gone) his anti-Labor campaign speeches sounded like tiresome Tory tirades. To these new voters, Tom's espousal of the cause of two railwaymen, victims of insentient bureaucracy, seemed absurdly out-of-character or merely quaint. It was enough to tip the scales against him—just to tip them—and Tom finally went down.

There was a delicious irony in Tom's *dénouement* which only he could truly savour: he was bowing out of politics exactly where he had made his entry in Townsville forty-five years before—execrating the Railways' "victimization" of the workers. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. No one in politics knew that better than Tom Aikens. He also knew that he left the stage in a burst of public acclaim—even with a nosegay of flowers, his very first, from one tearful member of the audience. A former state Treasurer who had gone into the Legislative Assembly with him sensed that "some of the 'giants' of today

"Bowing out?". Photo by courtesy of the *Townsville Daily Bulletin*.

would have been 'pygmies' in the 1940s and 1950s". "All the best, Tom," he said, "parliament was the richer for your presence, and I am glad to have shared your era."

Tom himself saw no reason for being so maudlin. He liked better the lyrical tribute of a senior citizen:

> We don't think you are too old
> Next time a different story may be told
> So if you have another go
> You can count on us you know.

After all, the next election was just another curtain away. . . .

Appendix I

Rules of the North Queensland Labour Party

1. Persons who are not members of any other political party may be accepted as members of the North Queensland Labour Party, provided that they subscribe to the aims and objects of Labour as determined by the Party from time to time in accordance with its policy of the emancipation of the workers, farmers and useful people, and its determination to secure a "Square Go for the North".
2. Intending members may be nominated by not less than two members at any regular meeting of a Branch, and shall be admitted or rejected by majority vote at the next meeting.
3. The Executive of a Branch shall consist of a President, two Vice-Presidents, three Committee members and a Secretary, who shall be elected each year at the Annual Meeting which shall be held in January each year.
4. The Branch Executive shall have power to deal with all matters affecting the business as may arise between meetings, except matters of change of policy.
5. The Annual Membership fee shall be decided at the Annual Meeting by simple resolution. Such fee shall be payable by members on or before the 31st March, otherwise membership shall lapse.
6. Candidates for Parliamentary or Municipal honours shall be elected by majority vote of the Branch concerned at the meeting mentioned in the press advertisement or any other medium of calling nominations for such positions.
7. The Secretary of a Branch shall be responsible for the handling and custody of all monies belonging to the Branch, and shall keep proper books of account, and present a balance sheet to the Annual Meeting of the Branch duly audited by members appointed by the Branch for such purpose.
8. The President and Secretary shall be empowered to operate on the bank account of the Branch with regard to withdrawals, but the Secretary alone shall be responsible for the banking of all monies as soon as possible after receipt.
9. All accounts owing by the Branch, or any disbursement whatever,

shall be considered by the Branch and payment agreed to by simple resolution. In extraordinary circumstances, the Executive may authorise payment, but must secure confirmation of such action at the next regular meeting.

10. The Branch shall have power to expel or refuse to renew the membership ticket of any member, provided that notice of such intention is given to the member thirty days in advance of the meeting at which such motion of expulsion or refusal-to-renew is to be tabled and discussed, so that the member shall have an opportunity to be present and, if he desires to do so, oppose such motion.

(Source: *NQLP Minutes 1954–1959*, endpaper.)

Appendix II

North Queensland Labour Party. Secretary's Report, 1959

Mr. President: With your kind permission to allow me to furnish a Report on the Branch Activities for the year 1959.

1. Several letters were written to Ministers of Federal Parliament, State Parliament, Police Department, City Council, T.R.E.B. [Townsville Regional Electricity Board], General Manager Railways and Road Safety Council and the replies received were always very favourable.

2. Branch meetings were always well attended by members who took a keen interest in the business of the Party. The average of members in attendance at each meeting would be seven.

3. Our Melbourne Cup Sweep was a huge success and showed a Profit of £458/7/4. Every ticket was sold and the drawing took place in Mr. Murgatroyd's office on Monday night, November 2nd under the supervision of Messrs. Aikens and Abercrombie and several members assisted. I must congratulate our worthy President on the system he has invented to draw our Sweep. It cannot be faultered [*sic*].

4. I am quite sure members of the Branch join with me in congratulating Mr. Aikens M.L.A. in the splendid work he has performed in and out of Parliament this term. Members of the Branch only have to read Hansard and then they can judge for themselves what fine work Mr. Aikens has done for North Queensland.

5. The Cheque Book and Ledger show a Credit Balance of £1,311/17/2. The Party is in a splendid financial position for the coming State Election in 1960.

6. I wish to congratulate Mr. and Mrs. Huddy and Lady Friends in forming the Women's Auxiliary. It may prove to be great publicity for the Branch to have Ladies assisting at the Booths on Election Day. Furthermore I should like to suggest that an invitation be extended to the Ladies who may be willing to speak over the Air during the Election Campaign. I hope members of the Party give this matter every consideration.

7. It is with deep regret we have lost a splendid member in Pat Rooney. His sudden death came as a terrific shock to all of us and he will be missed at our meetings. Pat had always taken a keen interest in the Branch's activities and was a great sticker for Mr. Aikens and all members of the Branch. After the last meeting of the Branch he

drove me home and we were discussing the coming Election and he was very keen on Mr. Aikens' success at the 1960 State Election. The last remark Pat made to me was that we had a fine body of Men in our Party. I feel sure all members join with me in sympathizing with Mrs. Rooney and three sons.

8. I wish to thank all members who helped me during the Year to carry on the duties as Secretary of the Branch. Also the good wishes they have extended to me during my illness. As this is the final meeting for the year 1959 I wish to take this opportunity in wishing all members a Merry Xmas and a bright and Prosperous New Year. Wishing the Branch every success in the future.

(signed) J. Patterson
per N.P.
Hon. Secretary

(Source: *NQLP Minutes 1954–1959*, insert.)

Appendix III

North Queensland Labour Party Campaign Policy, Townsville Municipal Election, 1946

WHAT THE GENUINE LABOR ALDERMEN HAVE DONE
A RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT
AND WHAT THEY INTEND TO DO
AN AGGRESSIVE AND CONSTRUCTIVE POLICY
TO THE ELECTORS OF TOWNSVILLE

Three years ago despite the criticisms of our opponents who claimed that we were dreamers and that our Policy of Municipal progress would bring increased rates and charges and financial ruin, you returned, with huge majorities, our genuine Labor Candidates as Aldermen.

Notwithstanding our splendid record of Public service, rates and charges have not been increased but we have already wiped off no less than £33,000 of the huge bank overdraft of £39,000 left as a legacy by the alleged business men who mismanaged the city affairs in the past.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

WATER SUPPLY: Townsville's water supply and reticulation has been improved by the construction of Aplin's Weir holding 400,000,000 gallons and by the construction of the West End Reservoir and in conformity with our programme of City development, generally, we have pursued a far-sighted policy of water extension into the outlying suburbs in order to provide this necessary amenity for those who previously did not enjoy it, but most of all the Council decided, and its decision was confirmed by you at the Polls, to proceed with the Mt. Spec Water Scheme. Following your decision we were able to persuade the Government to allow us to increase the diameter of the pipe line from 15 to 20 inches which will enable us to supply you with over 800,000,000 gallons of crystal clear water per annum. We have already commenced work on the Mt. Spec Water Scheme and it will be pushed forward with all possible speed.

ROAD CONSTRUCTION: Notwithstanding the excessive wear and tear of our streets as a result of our city being a great war base, we have been able to maintain our existing roads and provide new roads in many areas to meet the ever-growing needs of the people. In this year no less than £42,000 has been spent on road construction alone.

LADIES' REST ROOM: Our womenfolk, by their use and appreciation of our Rest Room, together with the free Stroller Service, daily give the lie direct to the cheap sneers of our opponents who publicly stated that our pledge at the last Municipal Election to open and equip such a Rest Room was just "an Election Stunt".

BATHING FACILITIES: We have fulfilled our Election promise by constructing free baths on the Strand and immediately money and materials are available we will complete the Tobruk Memorial Baths. Further we are having estimates prepared of the cost of erection and maintenance of bathing enclosures and dressing sheds at other suitable places.

FIRE WOOD: We opened and maintained during the acute fire wood shortage, a Municipal Fire Wood Depot which delivered over 2,000 loads of wood and was virtually the fuel salvation of many Townsville homes until such time as private wood dealers were able to resume operations.

BRIDGE OVER ROSS RIVER NEAR ROONEYS MILL: After years of unceasing representations the high level bridge over Ross River near Rooneys Mill will at last become an accomplished fact. A loan of £5,000 for the first portion of the work has been accepted by the Council and already our Engineers have taken the preparatory steps for the construction of this vital traffic bridge.

LEGAL AID DEPARTMENT: This Department set up by the Council to give free legal advice and assistance to genuine tenants and genuine home owners desiring the return of their property, has rendered such tremendous service to our people that since its establishment no less than 746 cases have been dealt with.

MUNICIPAL LIBRARY: Recognized throughout the Commonwealth as one of the finest Municipal Libraries in Australia, this outstanding monument of Municipal service last year issued 125,000 books to borrowers and provided a service to the people that can only be appreciated by a visit to the Library. In addition to the General Lending Library the Reference Section and studying facilities afforded to Townsville students have been the means of making higher education and improved opportunities available to scores of Townsville boys and girls whose parents could not have afforded the books that are readily available in this Section.

MUNICIPAL ICE WORKS: According to our opponents a Municipal Ice Works was classed as "madmen's dreams", yet realising that our people would rally to our support in this necessary step to abolish deplorable ice queues, we built the ice works despite intense opposition and today our people possess a magnificent asset which turns out 50,000 blocks of ice per month and had been mainly responsible for the resumption of ice deliveries in Townsville.

MUNICIPAL FRUIT MART: This is another bright jewel in our Municipal Crown. Opened like the ice works against strenuous opposition from our opponents, when our people were paying exorbitant prices for inferior fruit and vegetables and receiving inferior service,

the Municipal Fruit Mart brought prices tumbling down and increased the quality until today fruit and vegetables are cheaper on the average in Townsville than they are in the capital cities. It would be impossible to estimate just how much money the Municipal Fruit Mart has saved the people of Townsville. In addition we have inaugurated a Mobile Fruit Mart so that the suburban dwellers can secure the benefit of the Municipal Mart and as time goes on we hope to still further extend its activities.

CHILD CARE CENTRE: We have made provision for the opening of a well-equipped Child Care Centre in the City Buildings where mothers can leave their children under the care of trained nurses and kindergarteners, while they attend to their business in the city. This service should be available to the Mothers of Townsville within the next few weeks and it is not the fault of the Council that the opening of this boon to Mothers has been delayed even this far.

REMEMBER, THAT OUR OPPONENTS WHO ARE ALSO SEEKING YOUR SUFFRAGE ON APRIL 6TH BITTERLY OPPOSED AND DENOUNCED ALL OF THESE PROGRESSIVE MUNICIPAL ENTERPRISES AND AMENITIES AND ARE PLEDGED TO CLOSE THEM IF THEY ARE ELECTED.

OUR FUTURE POLICY

ELECTRIC LIGHT AND POWER: Following the passage of the Regional Electricity Act, Townsville was incorporated in the Townsville Regional Board and is represented thereon by two of our members one of whom, Alderman J.P. Corcoran, is Chairman. We will do all in our power to see that the Regional Board is operated in the interests of the people and further, we are pledged to continue the sale of electric stoves and appliances at the cheapest possible price and on the easiest possible terms, so that our people can utilize to the full, the benefit of the cheap electric light and power.

SEWERAGE: Although hampered by the War, we have been able to maintain a satisfactory rate of sewerage connections to the existing scheme, and we are at present in negotiation with the Government to have made available the money necessary for the construction of the North Ward Section which will complete the original Sewerage Scheme and in addition provide employment for many of our citizens including Returned Servicemen who are at present unemployed. Further, we intend to examine at the earliest possible opportunity, the possibility of extending the Sewerage Scheme to those suburbs not originally included.

MT. SPEC SCHEME: This will be pushed on with all possible speed now that it has been commenced and this also will provide much needed employment for many of our citizens in the confused immediate post-war period.

HOUSING: Realising the urgent need for houses we have taken the courageous step of requesting the State Housing Commission to constitute the Townsville City Council a Constructing Authority of

such Commission; this will enable us to provide much needed employment while at the same time we will relieve the acute housing shortage.

STREETS & DRAINAGE: The ambitious street construction scheme which was suspended at the outbreak of the war will be proceeded with in addition to a new and extensive schedule that is already in the course of preparation. Together with this we have already made an application to the Treasury, for a loan of £43,000 to enable us to embark on a huge drainage scheme that will serve the double purpose of mosquito eradication and flood prevention.

PARKS & RESERVES: Most of our parks and playing areas were taken over by the Military Authorities during the war but these are being gradually handed back and in accordance with our policy of providing the maximum of sporting and recreational facilities for our people we are providing, and will further provide for the extension of sporting facilities and beautification in all parks and recreation reserves.

MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS: Now that the war is over we will be able to proceed with our pre-war plan for the modernisation of this fine City asset which will provide for the re-modelling of the Central Hotel by extending it to embrace the Theatre Royal, making it one of the largest and most up-to-date hotels in the State and a credit to the City which owns it. The plan also included the re-modelling of the School of Arts into a modern combination Theatre and Recreation Hall.

CITY PROGRESS: Believing as we do in the enormous possibilities of development in North Queensland, of which Townsville is the logical capital, we will continue our progressive and far-seeing policy of wholehearted co-operation with all Bodies and Organisations in the North, which have for their object the establishment of New Industries and the advancement of Northern Queensland or Townsville in any way at all.

TRANSPORT SERVICES: We will continue our endeavours to acquire and operate all Townsville 'Bus Services in the interests of the people.

MUNICIPAL ENTERPRISES: We will expand existing, and establish new Municipal Enterprises wherever possible and practicable.

RECLAMATION: Plans are being prepared for a Comprehensive Policy of resumption and reclamation of low-lying land in the City area.

WARTIME CONDITIONS: We will take whatever steps we consider necessary to remove all wartime restrictions and conditions and to completely abolish food queues and re-establish deliveries of all commodities on a pre-war basis.

THIS IS OUR PROUD RECORD

During the troublous years of war when many of our opponents were silent, we took a firm and uncompromising stand against all those who tried to make the war period a golden harvest time of profit; and against

all those in authority whether Military or Civil, who attempted to use the war as an excuse to trample your civil liberties under foot. We were bitterly opposed by the profiteers, the racketeers, the slum landlords and the rackrenters who supported the policy of PROFIT before PEOPLE, and we have made many enemies among that Section of the Community, but we are proud of their enmity because we realise that the measure of their hatred is an indication of the faithful and honest service we have rendered to the decent and useful people of our Community. Opposing us there will be various teams of candidates of all manner and description. Some owing allegiance through the Chamber of Commerce to the Merchants and Brewers who, in the days of our desperate food shortages, brought the infamous "beer-ships" to Townsville loaded to the water line with liquor, and leaving potatoes, perishables and vitally needed foodstuffs on the Southern wharves. The alleged "Official" Labor Team owing allegiance to the A.W.U. controlled Q.C.E. is again insulting your intelligence by asking for your votes on April 6th. They think that you have forgotten that when the Townsville City Council sent Ald. T. Aikens to Canberra in the dark days of the war in order to discuss with the Prime Minister and his Ministers the needs of our people and our City, the same A.W.U. officials actuated by political spleen, attempted to prevent him reaching Canberra and accomplishing his mission. You demonstrated your contempt of this "official" Labor Party at the last election by placing them at the bottom of the poll, and we have no doubt that in your own interests you will do so again. In our appeal to you, we will not demean your nature by adopting the personal slander and scandal tactics of some of our opponents. We consider the issues confronting you are much too serious for that. Our City must make up the leeway lost by the war, our people must be provided with homes, jobs and all the things for which the war was fought and won. There must be among our people, freedom from fear and freedom from want; and in the battle for the new order that was promised our fighting and working men and women, the Local Authorities of Australia will play an important part. It is necessary therefore, for you to see that in the post-war period, when many issues have to be faced and overcome, that your Council is controlled by men who have proved their worth and in whom you can place your trust.

WE STAND ON OUR RECORD. WE BELIEVE WE HAVE COME THROUGH THE DIFFICULT WAR PERIOD WITH YOUR CONFIDENCE IN US STRONGER THAN EVER, AND WE HAVE BY OUR PROGRESSIVE MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATION, MADE THE TOWNSVILLE CITY COUNCIL THE BEST KNOWN AND PUBLICISED COUNCIL IN AUSTRALIA, AND ON APRIL 6TH WE CONFIDENTLY LEAVE THE ISSUE TO YOU.

(Source: "Murgatroyd Private Papers.")

Appendix IV

Hermit Park Labour Records its Achievements for Posterity: The Longest Motion on the Books of the Townsville City Council

At the Ordinary Meeting of the Townsville City Council on 18th July 1946, it was moved by Alderman Murgatroyd and seconded by Alderman Aikens "that the Town Clerk be instructed to write advising *Smith's Weekly* that the paragraph appearing in its issue of July 6th 1946, headed 'Townsville Red Anted' is a malicious libel upon the Council of the City of Townsville and upon the people of Townsville who have shown their confidence in the members of their Council by returning the majority of them for several successive terms. That this paper be further advised that no member of this Council is connected with the Communist Party and that the Council is not, and never has been, controlled by or its actions dictated by Communists. That this Progressive Working Class City Council, during the war period strenously and successfully fought proposed despotic military control and both State and Federal Officialdom to secure the adequate defence of North Queensland, and a fair share of available supplies of necessities for the people of Townsville and North Queensland generally. That in addition to successfully conducting usual Municipal activities it has established and successfully operated, (1) a Municipal Fruit and vegetable Mart, which has combated the fruit and vegetable black market racketeers and reduced the price of thse commodities by at least 50% in Townsville; (2) a Municipal Wood Depot which, until local fuel merchants were able to resume business, supplied wood at cost to the citizens of Townsville; (3) a free Municipal Library which is the most modern and efficient free Municipal Library in Australia; (4) an up-to-date Ladies' Rest Room in the heart of the City for our womenfolk; (5) a free Stroller Service for the benefit of the Mothers of Townsville; (6) a free Legal Aid Department to assit both those who are in danger of wrongful eviction and those who are justly entitled to regain possession of their homes. That the Council's latest activity is the completion of plans for the early establishment of a Day Nursery as a further benefit for the Mothers of Townsville. That this Council has seen no evidence that Townsville Sporting Bodies 'move as the Council pull the strings' and is of the opinion that the bona fides of the alleged 'terrifed Townsville business man' would, if examined, prove as false as his statements are untrue." *Carried.*

(Source: *Townsville City Council Minutes* (25), pp. 2155–2156.)

Appendix V

Recommendations Contained in the Report on Civilian Morale in North Queensland

(1) that facilities for the expression of the civilian point of view and for hearing civilian complaints by the Government and Services should be improved;
(2) that machinery should be established at once for ensuring the adjustment of civilian and Service demands. The claims of both could thus be properly assessed and, where the quantity of goods available is so limited that competition is taking place, either a rationing scheme introduced or stocks at least be set aside for the children. This recommendation could be referred to the Department of War Organisation of Industry which should confer with the military authorities;
(3) Price Control Regulations should be rigidly policed to prevent traders from taking advantage of shortages;
(4) even more strenuous efforts should be made by the forces to prevent misuse of buildings taken over and waste of food and fuel;
(5) a series of intensive campaigns should be undertaken to correct the commoner civilian misapprehensions. This applies not only to local matters but to news about the rest of Australia;
(6) Relations with the Forces would improve if the Army cleared up certain misunderstandings (e.g., when a serviceman has been involved in an accident the people should be told of the decision of the court martial);
(7) young people, especially girls, should be enlightened on the problems of VD;
(8) the Australian Services should collaborate fully with the civilian authorities in giving the State authorities the fullest possible information about actual VD infections which occur;
(9) the demoralising effects of the blackout are so serious that the closest scrutiny of the reasons advanced in favour of its continuance is called for;
(10) the feeling of isolation which exists in the North is aggravated by the absence of broadcasts after sunset, and it is recommended that the restrictions be reviewed;
(11) the milk requirements of householders should have preference over those of milk bars;
(12) full use should be made by the Services of the refrigerating capacity of the meatworks;

(13) the number of accidents suggests the need for training everyone in the proper use of the roads;
(14) wet canteens should be opened in the cities if only for the sake of reserving a certain amount of liquor sold in hotels for civilians. Sales would require to be rigidly controlled to prevent quarrelling;
(15) the immediate attention of the Government should be given to large scale market gardening on the Atherton Tableland;
(16) goods in short supply to civilians should never be thrown away by the Forces even when a unit is suddenly moved. The distribution of surplus stocks of vegetables would be readily undertaken by municipal officials;
(17) adequate recreational facilities should be made available in barracks occupied by Women's Services;
(18) transit centres should not be referred to as Clubs;
(19) the American authorities should be requested to take stronger action against truck drivers whose vehicles are unduly noisy;
(20) consideration should be given by the Services to the extent to which soldiers located in a town compete with civilians for goods in short supply. Remedial measures would be very helpful.

(Source: *Commonwealth Records Series* A816, 37/301/199)

Appendix VI

An Aikens' Oratorical Sampler: On the Testament of Sexual Offenders against Children

. . . In dealing with sexual offenders, I do not think the Attorney-General has gone far enough. The usual sexual offender, the moron, goes out and molests young girls and commits criminal offences. He is beyond redemption physically or mentally and I believe one punishment and one alone would be effective. For the second offence —no third time—the second time a man is charged with a sexual offence against a young girl that man should be castrated. . . . If you castrate a man then you render him absolutely impotent and destroy for ever his liability to attack these unfortunate young girls. I know that my words, if published, will raise a howl of horror and protest from the wowsers of this community of all denominations who believe man is made in the image of God, and that man is the creation of God. The sooner we get away from that stupid idea the better. Man is created by man and must be controlled by man.

I have given a considerable amount of study to sexual crimes, and as far as I know the only complete work on sexual crimes was the excellent work published by a German doctor named Faber, in German, in 1931; and so unpopular has the study of sexual crimes been amongst the medical profession that I cannot find any trace of its ever having been translated into English or any other language.

There is a serious conflict of opinion between members of the medical profession as to the best means of dealing with sexual offenders. There is first of all the psychiatrist [who] belives sexual acts are caused by some mental disturbance. . . . His claims are vigorously disputed by the endocrinologists, who say that sexual offenders and subnormal or abnormal sexual desires are the result of a deficiency in certain ductless glands in the body, and are at daggers drawn with the psychiatrists. . . . Then we have the psychologist, who in most cases is not a medical man . . . [and] who by delving into what he calls the libido and subconscious mind and by confusing you with a lot of verbiage concerning reflexes and complexes, gets you so mentally confused that you do not know whether the man is trying to sell you some new medical theory or a new pair of patent-leather elastic-sided boots. Then, of course, there is the social worker. He is not a member of the medical profession but maintains that these sexual cranks and fanatics, these

sadistic beasts—because that is what they are—can be cured by the milk-and-water or pap method of putting them into a nice home and allowing them to mingle with decent people and telling them, and perhaps by putting diagrams on a blackboard to show them, how really awful it is for them to go out into the world and molest little girls and commit their filthy six crimes. . . . I defy any medical man to produce any concrete evidence substantiated by medical certificates to prove that any sexual offender has been cured of his obssession by medical treatment either by psychiatrists, endocrinologists, or by any other form of medical treatment except the treatment that I have suggested—the first and last treatment I suggest—of castration. . . . The offender having been brought before the magistrate and the magistrate having committed him to the judge, the judge is then empowered, according to [this] Bill, to take the advice of two medical men as to whether the prisoner should be declared an habitual criminal or committed to the care of a particular institution. These medical men may not have any knowledge of sexual offences. First of all their medical vision may be blinded by their lack of world knowledge. How many doctors do you, Mr. Speaker, and other honourable members know who have no worldly knowledge whatever? How many judges are lacking in worldly knowledge—I mean who could be bought and sold by the average man of the street in any matters of worldly concern? . . . It has been suggested that we might be able to help the Attorney-General and his officers and the judges and the magistrates of the courts by closing down on what might be termed the lascivious picture and pornographic literature. I claim to be no more than the average citizen of average intelligence, just about the equal of any honourable member in this Chamber, and I for one have seen scores of lascivious pictures and I have read reams and reams of pornographic literature, yet it does not excite any abnormal or subnormal desire in me any more than it does in any other honourable member of this Assembly. How then can these pictures and literature be blamed for the actions of our sexual morons who appear regularly in our police courts. . . . I am one of those who believe that the more of her body a woman exposes the less liable she is to arouse sexual desire in the male who is fortunate or unfortunate enough to be looking at her at the time. We can go to the beaches and see our women with abbreviated trunks and brassieres. We can go to the vaudeville shows and various stage presentations and see near-nudism of women right before our eyes and I doubt if any normal man's blood pressure or temperature rises as a result of that display of bare flesh. More often than not it repels him. . . . We may as well say that because we go to the pictures sometimes and hear the hideous ululations of Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra, our musical taste is decayed. The groaning and moanings of these alleged crooners only appeal to those whose minds are so musically low that they are receptive of that particular type of what might be termed singing. So it is with salacious pictures and pornographic literature; it has no effect on the normal mind. . . .

Since I made my first-reading speech . . . I have received seven letters from Brisbane doctors . . . and all of them have told me, in different words, that my suggestion for dealing with these sexual cranks was the only sensible suggestion put forward in the House. . . .

(Source: *Queensland Parliamentary Debates 1944–1945*, vol. CLXXXIV, pp. 2000 ff.)

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. I use the NQLP's spelling of "labour" throughout. Although the NQLP was not formally constituted until 1949, originally calling itself the Hermit Park Labour Party or, more commonly, the Hermit Park "ALP", I shall for the sake of convenience often refer to it, although anachronistically, as the NQLP in the period before 1949.
2. The other was the Kearsley Shire Council in New South Wales. Between 1939 and 1946 the Communist Party gained considerable support in local government elections throughout Australia and scored a number of electoral victories. Five communists were elected to the Kearsley Shire Council in 1944 in local government elections at which a total of eighteen communists throughout New South Wales were successful. See Alastair Davidson, *The Communist Party of Australia: A Short History* (Stanford, 1969), p. 93. See also A.E. Jones, "Electoral Support for the Communist Party in North Queensland: A study of F.W. Paterson's Victory in Bowen, 1944", unpublished thesis (University of Queensland, 1972), p. 27.
3. G.C. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away: A History of North Queensland to 1920* (Brisbane, 1963), p. 187.

CHAPTER 1

1. See, for example, the *Home Hill Observer*, 28 Feb. 1924.
2. P.P. Courtenay, "Townsville: North Queensland's Expanding Capital," *Architecture in Australia* (Feb. 1968), p. 92.
3. Loc. cit.
4. See Terence Cutler, "Sunday, Bloody Sunday: The Townsville Meatworkers' Strike of 1918–1919", in J. Iremonger, J. Merritt, G. Osborne, eds., *Strikes: Studies in Twentieth Century Australian Social History* (Sydney, 1973), pp. 81–102.
5. Ibid., p. 82.
6. Ibid., p. 87.
7. Ibid., p. 86.
8. See A.E. Jones, "Electoral Support for the Communist Party in North Queensland", pp. 97–98.
9. Ibid., pp. 57, 91.
10. Ibid., p. 57.

11. G.C. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p. 163.
12. Ibid., p. 320.
13. Ibid., p. 336.
14. See Colin A. Hughes and B.D. Graham, *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics, 1890–1964* (Canberra, 1968), pp. 524–525.
15. See Chapter 13 below.
16. See T.P. Fry, "State Elections—Queensland," *The Australian Quarterly* (June, 1935), p. 90.
17. See my earlier, though far from definitive, studies of the New State movements, "A Brief History of the Separatist Movements in North Queensland," unpublished thesis (University of Queensland, 1955); and "Federal and State Attitudes to Movements for Regional Self-Government in Australia, 1901–1954," unpublished thesis (University of Queensland, 1955).
18. See especially Josephine Sullivan, "Localism in North Queensland, 1865–1887," unpublished thesis (James Cook University of North Queensland, 1970).
19. See E.M. Higgins, "The Queensland Labour Governments, 1915–1929," unpublished thesis (University of Melbourne, 1954) p. ix.
20. Ibid., p. iv.
21. Ibid., pp. 12–37. See also M.B. Cribb, "Some Manifestations of Ideological Conflict within the Labour Movement in Queensland, 1924 to 1929", unpublished thesis (University of Queensland, 1964), pp. 7–17.
22. See D.J. Murphy, "The Establishment of State Enterprises in Queensland, 1915–1918," *Labour History*, 14 (May 1968), pp. 13–22.
23. J.B. Dalton, "An Interpretative Survey: the Queensland Labour Movement," Chapter 1 in D.J. Murphy, R.B. Joyce and Colin A. Hughes, eds., *Prelude to Power; The Rise of the Labour Party in Queensland, 1885–1915* (Brisbane, 1970), p. 23.
24. D.W. Rawson, *Labour in Vain?* (Melbourne, 1966), p. 65.
25. E.M. Higgins, "The Queensland Labour Governments," pp. 12–37.
26. See D.J. Murphy, "The Establishment of State Enterprises," p. 13. Cf. also E.M. Higgins, "The Queensland Labour Governments," pp. 12–37; and M.B. Cribb, "Some Manifestations of Ideological Conflict,", p. 8.
27. Ian Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics: The Dynamics of the Labour Movement in Eastern Australia, 1900–1921* (Canberra, 1965), p. 53.
28. See J.A. McCallum, "The Economic Basis of Australian Politics," in W.G.K. Duncan, ed., *Trends in Australian Politics* (Sydney, 1935), p. 58. Cf. also D. Volker, "The Australian Labor Party in Queensland, 1927–35," unpublished thesis (University of Queensland, 1962), p. 128.
29. See A.A. Morrison, "The Brisbane General Strike of 1912," Chapter 8 in Murphy et al., *Prelude to Power*, esp. p. 139.
30. Robin Gollan, *Radical and Working Class Politics: A Study of Eastern Australia, 1850–1910* (Melbourne, 1960), p. 7.
31. Ian Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, pp. 52–53.
32. Russell Ward, *The Australian Legend* (Melbourne, 1965), p. 167.
33. S.M. Lipset, *Political Man* (London, 1969), pp. 235, 251–52.
34. See G.C. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p. 187. Cf. also June Stoodley, "Labour and Gold-Mining," Chapter 11 in Murphy et al, *Prelude to Power*, pp. 164–177.
35. June Stoodley, "Labour and Gold-Mining," p. 166.
36. See Robin Gollan, *Radical and Working Class Politics*, p. 145; cf. G.C. Bolton. *A Thousand Miles Away*, pp. 194, 196–97. See also H. Kenway,

"The Pastoral Strikes of 1891 and 1894," Chapter 7 in Murphy et al., *Prelude to Power*, pp. 111–126.
37. H. Kenway, "The Pastoral Strikes of 1891 and 1894," loc. cit.
38. See Irwin Young, *Theodore: His Life and Times* (Sydney, 1971), p. 15.
39. G.C. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p. 337.
40. Ian Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, *op. cit.* p. 62.
41. See Terence Cutler, "Sunday, Bloody Sunday," in J. Iremonger et al., *Strikes*, pp. 81–102, esp. pp. 82, 85.

CHAPTER 2

1. See L.J. Colwell, "Some Aspects of Social Life in Charters Towers from 1872 to 1900 with Some Emphasis on the Nineties," unpublished thesis (James Cook University of North Queensland, 1969).
2. Ibid., pp. 1.14, 5.14, 5.15.
3. See June Stoodley, "Labour and Gold-Mining," Chapter 11 in Murphy et al., *Prelude to Power*, pp. 166–167.
4. L.J. Colwell, *"Social Life in Charters Towers,"* p. 1.14.
5. "Memoirs of Thomas Aikens," unpublished transcript of tape recordings in six folders, held by the writer ["Aikens Mem." [1]–[6]], (1), p. 29.
6. Ibid., p. 17.
7. Ibid., p. 24.
8. L.J. Colwell, "Social Life in Charters Towers,"p. 5.15.
9. See Terence Cutler, "Sunday, Bloody Sunday," in J. Iremonger et al., *Strikes*, pp. 83–84.
10. "Aikens Mem." (1), p. 10.
11. Geoffrey Blainey, *Mines in the Spinifex: The Story of Mount Isa Mines* (Sydney, 1960), p. 41.
12. Cloncurry Centenary Celebrations Committee, *Cloncurry 100: 1867–1967* (Mount Isa, 1967), p. 19.
13. Quoted by Geoffrey Blainey, *Mines in the Spinifex*, p. 43.
14. Ibid., p. 45.
15. See ibid., p. 53.
16. See G.C. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p. 268.
17. Geoffrey Blainey, *Mines in the Spinifex*, p. 28.
18. "Aikens Mem." (2), p. 82.
19. See Russell Ward, *The Australian Legend*, p. 167.
20. *The Advocate*, 10 Dec. 1924. This newspaper was the official organ of the Queensland branch of the ARU, beginning its colourful life as *The Militant* and appearing under that banner from 1 Sept. 1919 to 10 Oct. 1921. Its new name followed shortly after the reconstitution of the old Queensland Railway Union as the ARU (Queensland Branch) on 7 June 1921.
21. See Aikens' reflections in *Queensland Parliamentary Debates (QPD), 1945–1946*, vol. CXXXV, p. 397.
22. "Aikens Mem." (1), p. 27. See also ibid., p. 47.
23. Ibid., p. 28.
24. See Terence Cutler, "Sunday, Bloody Sunday," in J. Iremonger et al., *Strikes*, p. 86.
25. Loc. cit. See also L.L. Robson, *The First A.I.F.: A Study of its Recruitment, 1914–1918* (Melbourne, 1970), esp. pp. 82–122.
26. The relevant sources here are *Minutes of the Cloncurry Shire Council*,

2 vols., 13 June 1922–9 Feb. 1927; 23 March 1927–9 Dec. 1931 (*CSC Mins.* [1]–[2]), (1), p. 162; (2), p. 6; and *The Advocate*.
27. "Aikens Mem." (2), p. 57.
28. Ibid., (1), p. 24.
29. See *The Militant*, 1 Sept. 1919 (quoting Ingersoll).
30. See Robin Gollan, "Radical and Working Class Politics," p. 106.
31. "Aikens Mem." (2), pp. 80–82.
32. *The Militant*, 6 March 1920.
33. Loc. cit.
34. "Aikens Mem." (2), pp. 54–60.
35. Ibid., (2), p. 63.
36. Loc. cit.
37. *CSC Mins.* (1), pp. 65–68.
38. Ibid., p. 82.
39. Ibid., p. 124.
40. Geoffrey Blainey, *Mines in the Spinifex*, p. 64.
41. Ibid., p. 76.
42. *CSC Mins.* (2), p. 313.

CHAPTER 3

1. See D. Volker, "The Australian Labor Party in Queensland," p. 14.
2. See E.M. Higgins, "The Queensland Labour Governments," p. 93.
3. See *The Militant*, 1 Sept. 1919.
4. See M.B. Cribb, "Some Manifestations of Ideological Conflict," pp. 29, 39. Cf. also Margaret Cribb, "State in Emergency," in J. Iremonger et al., *Strikes*, pp. 228, 236.
5. *QPD (1924)*, vol. CXLIII, pp. 110–111. Cf. also Irwin Young, *Theodore*, p. 59.
6. "Aikens Mem." (1), p. 37.
7. Ian Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p. 76.
8. Robin Gollan, *Radical and Working Class Politics*, p. 213.
9. J.B. Dalton, "An Interpretative Survey: The Queensland Labour Movement," Chapter 1 in Murphy et al., *Prelude to Power*, p. 7.
10. See Ian Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p. 75.
11. "Aikens Mem." (1), p. 4.
12. For full details, see E.M. Higgins, "The Queensland Labour Governments," pp. 12–37.
13. See M.B. Cribb, "Some Manifestations of Ideological Conflict," p. 41.
14. Ibid., p. 10.
15. See E.M. Higgins, "The Queensland Labour Governments," pp. 38–58.
16. See M.G. Sullivan, "Dissent in the Labor Party, 1933–44," unpublished thesis (University of Queensland, 1962), p. 37.
17. "Aikens Mem." (1), p. 35.
18. See *The Advocate*, 15 Dec. 1928.
19. Ibid., 15 Aug. 1927.
20. Ibid., 15 Sept. 1931.
21. See E.M. Higgins, "The Queensland Labour Governments," pp. 59–62. Cf. also M.B. Cribb, "Some Manifestations of Ideological Conflict," pp. 46–52.
22. M.B. Cribb, "Some Manifestations of Ideological Conflict," p. 52.
23. "Aikens Mem." (1), p. 38.
24. M.B. Cribb, "Some Manifestations of Ideological Conflict," p. 52.

25. Loc. cit.
26. Ibid., p. 60.
27. For a detailed analysis of this strike, resulting from the railwaymen's refusal to handle "black" sugar from the South Johnstone sugar mill, see E.M. Higgins, "The Queensland Labour Governments," pp. 93–127.
28. M.B. Cribb, "Some Manifestations of Ideological Conflict," pp. 27–28.
29. See E.M. Higgins, "The Queensland Labour Governments," pp. 59–62.
30. See E.M. Higgins, "Queensland Labor: Trade Unionists versus Premiers," *Historical Studies of Australia and New Zealand*, vol. 9: 34, p. 148.
31. *The Advocate*, 21 Sept. 1927.
32. "Aikens Mem." (2), p. 72.
33. See Robin Gollan, "Some Consequences of the Depression," in R. Cooksey, ed., *The Great Depression in Australia* (Canberra, 1970), pp. 182–186.
34. D. Volker, "The Australian Labor Party in Queensland," p. 14. See especially Volker's analysis of the voting figures for the election.
35. M.G. Sullivan, "Dissent in the Labor Party," p. 60.
36. The relevant source here is M.J. Thompson, "The Political Career of William Forgan Smith—as it influenced Economic and Political Development in Queensland," unpublished thesis (University of Queensland, 1965).
37. *The Advocate*, 1 Sept. 1942.
38. See A.E. Jones, "Electoral Support for the Communist Party," passim.
39. See S.K. Young, "The Protestant Labor Party," unpublished thesis (University of Queensland, 1971).
40. See L.F. Crisp, *The Parliamentary Government of the Commonwealth of Australia* (London, 1949), p. 74 (quoting C. Hartley Grattan).

CHAPTER 4

1. "Aikens Mem." (2), p. 86.
2. *Home Hill Observer*, 3 Dec. 1931.
3. *QPD (1945–1946)*, vol. CLXXXVI, p. 1829.
4. See Clem Lack, *Three Decades of Queensland Political History, 1929–1960* (Brisbane, n.d.), p. 118. Lack's book, which was occasioned by the centenary of the opening of the first parliament of Queensland on 22 May 1860, is filled with inaccuracies. It is, however, the only ready reference work on Queensland politics covering this period and, until superseded, remains a useful handbook for the researcher.
5. Ibid., p. 117.
6. "Aikens Mem." (2), p. 94.
7. Ibid., (2), p. 95. A copy of the "black list" is held by Mr A.D. Murgatroyd of Townsville.
8. "Aikens Mem." (2), p. 94.
9. Ibid., (2), p. 96.
10. Ibid., (2), pp. 96–98.
11. Ibid., (3), p. 101.

CHAPTER 5

1. See L.A. Watson ("Rapier"), *The Townsville Story* (Townsville, 1951–1952), pp. 36, 70.

2. *E relatione*, A.D. Murgatroyd, at the time a member of the Hermit Park ALP (later alderman of the Townsville City Council).
3. *Minutes of the North Queensland Labour Party, 1935–1941 [NQLP Mins.]*, passim. The Hermit Park branch was so wealthy that it could afford to make periodic donations to other less fortunate ALP branches, for example, Stewart's Creek and Oonoonba (ibid., 2 Sept. 1935). Stewart's Creek was the original name of Townsville's main industrial suburb of Stuart. The change of name was effected on 19 January 1939 on the recommendation of the District Postal Inspector (see *Minutes of the Townsville City Council*, numbered volumes [*TCC Mins.*], (23), p. 1264).
4. There are instances of Aikens' image-building in *NQLP Mins.*, passim, but see especially ibid., 21 April 1935 and 18 August 1935.
5. Geoffrey Blainey, *The Tyranny of Distance* (Melbourne, 1966), esp. p. 171.
6. *NQLP Mins.*, 15 Dec. 1935.
7. "Aikens Mem." (3), p. 103.
8. See *The Townsville Daily Bulletin* [*TDB*], 25 March 1936.
9. See *TDB*, 6 April 1936 and *The North Queensland Register* [*NQR*], 11 April 1936, where the election results are given. Apart from the Mayor, J.S. Gill, one other Independent (W.J. Wakeford) was successful at the polls.
10. *TDB*, 31 March 1936.
11. *NQR*, 11 April 1936.
12. See *TCC Mins.* (22), p. 974.
13. *TDB*, 20 Aug. 1937.
14. Loc. cit.
15. See *TDB*, 18 Sept. 1937; also *The Townsville Evening Star* [*TES*], 17 Sept. 1937 and 20 Sept. 1937. The *Star* ceased publication on Saturday, 13 April 1940.
16. See the *Sunday Truth* (Brisbane), on 3 Sept 1961. In an article, "Modest Tom", *Truth* called this one of Aikens' "notable quotes".
17. "Aikens Mem." (3), p. 104.
18. Loc. cit.
19. Loc. cit.
20. See *TDB*, 30 March 1939.
21. See *TES*, 20 Nov. 1936 (Aikens' initial proposal for the establishment of a Council electrical retailing trading department); see also *NQLP Mins.*, 22 Aug. 1937, 18 Sept. 1937 (Hermit Park ALP support for Aikens' proposal). Labor's policy in the 1939 municipal election campaign was outlined fully in the party's northern regional newspaper, *The Clarion*, 24 March 1939.
22. See *TES*, 23 July 1937.
23. See *TDB*, 30 March 1939.
24. Loc. cit. See also Aikens' remarks in parliament, *QPD (1945–1946)*, vol. CLXXXVI, pp. 1751, 1765–1766. 2032.
25. *TDB*, 13 March 1939, 15 March 1939.
26. See A.E. Jones, "Electoral Support for the Communist Party," esp. Chapter 5 and pp. 134, 145. See also *TDB*, 7 Sept. 1940.
27. See L.A. Watson, *The Townsville Story*, p. 77.
28. *TDB*, 28 March 1939.
29. This was told to me by a former alderman of the Townsville City Council. See also *NQR*, 10 May 1947, eulogizing the mayor on the occasion of his 80th birthday on 6 May 1947.
30. See *The Clarion*, 24 March 1939, which gives several interesting thumbnail sketches of the successful ALP candidates.

31. See *TDB*, 30 March 1939; *NQR*, 8 April 1939. See also *TES*, 17 April 1939, under the heading, "Labor–Communist Control Effective".
32. *NQR*, 8 April 1939.
33. See *TDB*, 3 April 1939; *NQR*, 8 April 1939.
34. See *TCC Mins.* (23), p. 1285.
35. See *TDB*, 19 May 1939.
36. *TCC Mins.* (23), p. 1322. See also *TDB*, 16 June 1939; *TES*, 22 July 1939. Under the terms of the Local Government Act of 1936 it appeared that the Council might not be competent to enter into hire purchase agreements. However, an inquiry to the Department of Health and Home Affairs elicited the response that the state government was agreeable to the proposed scheme (see *TCC Mins*, [23], p. 1327; also *TES*, 18 Aug. 1939).
37. See *TDB*, 20 Dec. 1939.
38. See *The Clarion*, 24 March 1939, advertising the fare of the Plaza cinema, West End.
39. A sampling of films screened in Townsville over the weekend 24 March to 26 March 1939 (see *The Clarion*, 24 March 1939).
40. See *TCC Mins.* (23), p. 1343.
41. Ibid., p. 1307.
42. Ibid., pp. 1259, 1381.
43. See *TDB*, 20 Dec. 1939. Official reports from the various City Departments to the Council's principal committees are at present inaccessible for the years before 1950. While they remain in this state, a good deal of useful information may still be garnered from files of the local newspapers, the *Bulletin* and the *Star*, both of which reported Council affairs extensively if not always accurately. For example, the *Bulletin* reporter who looked back over the Council's activites in 1939 either relied on a poor memory or was a rather slipshod researcher. The twenty-five acres of land at Pimlico, which he mentions as having been acquired for future park development (the present Anderson Park, or new Botanic Gardens) were actually bought in 1938, not 1939, and at a cost of £625, not £655 (see *TCC Mins.* [23], pp. 1224, 1232).
44. See *TCC Mins.* (23), pp. 1274, 1281, 1286, 1321, 1338, 1357, 1368. The decision to transfer the Townsville aerodrome from Ross River Plains, near the meat-works, to a site adjoining the Town Common was made on 17 November 1938 (see *TCC Mins.* [23], p. 1246; also *TDB*, 18 Nov. 1938).
45. *TCC Mins.* (23), p. 1299. The Municipal Library was acquired by the previous Council on 1 July 1938 when the Townsville School of Arts handed over the whole of its assets to the Local Authority (see *TES*, 22 April 1938, 18 June 1938). In its first year of operation as a civic cultural enterprise, the net cost of maintenance, including the purchase of new books, was £635. This was the equivalent of 1.2 per cent of rate collections, or nine pence per annum for each ratepayer, on a property whose land value for rating purposes was £75. At the end of 1939, there were some 10 200 volumes in the library (see *TDB*, 30 Dec. 1939).
46. See *TDB*, 30 Dec. 1939.
47. Loc. cit.

CHAPTER 6

1. See *TCC Mins.* (25), p. 2083. Initially, there were twelve strollers.

2. The phrase appeared in the "Local Government Platform" of the Australian Labor Party (Queensland Branch).
3. "Plank" No. 4 of the ALP Local Government Platform read: "All communal enterprises such as tramways, omnibuses, ferries, baths, lighting, water supply, and markets to be conducted and controlled by the Local Authority."
4. See Chapters 7 and 8 below.
5. See A.A. Calwell, *Be Just and Fear Not* (Melbourne, 1972), p. 169.
6. See *TCC Mins.* (24), p. 1606. The Townsville City Council was opposed to the state government's decision.
7. "Aikens Mem." (3), p. 109. Aikens' recollection is corroborated by various contemporary sources. See, for example, the remarks of Alderman Murgatroyd in 1946: " . . . this progressive working class City Council during the war period strenuously and successfully fought proposed despotic military control and both State and Federal officialdom to secure the adequate defence of North Queensland and a fair share of available supplies of necessities for the people of Townsville and North Queensland generally" (*TCC Mins.* [25], pp. 2155–2156).
8. See *TDB*, 22 April 1943, outlining the Hermit Park ALP–Communist Party proposals to end shortages. In this same issue, the *Bulletin* leader writer deplored the appearance of party politics in "domestic administration": "At one time, even after the voting on the general roll was enforced, Townsville municipal voters astounded Queensland Labour circles by consistently electing a more or less conservative municipality. This, too, in spite of the fact that Townsville was, and as it still is, a recognized Labour centre. . . . Now party politics, and not local politics, seem to control the casting of votes." The criticism was distinctly unfair to the extent that the candidates of the Left had virtually no opposition from the Right. After the 1939 elections the old Ratepayers' Organization had faded out of existence, to be hurriedly replaced by a Citizens' Municipal Organization on 18 March 1943, only six weeks before the municipal poll of that year.
9. See *TDB*, 3 May 1943 (on the results of the election).
10. See *TCC Mins.* (24), p. 1607.
11. *The Clarion*, 24 March 1939.
12. See R.F.B. Wake, Inspector (Brisbane) to Director, Commonwealth Investigation Branch (Canberra), 1 March 1940, *Commonwealth Records Series BF/361, Item 2–3 ("Unregistered Correspondence")* [*CRS* BP/361, 2–3].
13. See *TCC Mins.* (24), p. 1738.
14. See *TDB*, 16 April 1943, 27 March 1943, 5 April 1943, 12 April 1943, reporting the *rapprochement* between the Hermit Park ALP and the Communist Party. See also *TCC Mins.* (24), pp. 1859, 1869.
15. *TDB*, 12 April 1943.
16. See *Townsville City Council Committee Reports (1942–1943)*, vol. 18 [*TCC Reports* (18)], Special Committee, 5 Feb. 1943, recommending the establishment of such a department. See also *TDB*, 22 April 1943, where the aims of the department were defined as "assisting tenants against racketeering landlords, and honest home owners to regain possession of their homes".
17. See *QPD (1944–1945)*, p. 673. This is Aikens' version. Except for the reference to the Royal Australian Air Force, which ought to have been to the Department of Civil Aviation, his account tallies with the official Council report. See *TCC Reports* (18), Special Committee, 4 June 1943.

18. See *Smith's Weekly*, 5 June 1943; also *TDB*, 22 May 1943, reporting court proceedings.
19. See *CRS* MP 742, 259/37/964.
20. *CRS* MP 742, 259/37/1149.
21. *TCC Reports* (18), Special Committee, 10 Sept. 1943.
22. The estimate was Alderman Murgatroyd's. See *TDB*, 20 Dec. 1943.
23. *TCC Reports* (18), Special Committee, 5 Feb. 1943. See also *TDB*, 22 April 1943.
24. See *TCC Reports* (18), Special Committee, 2 July 1943.
25. *TCC Reports* (18), Special Committee, 3 Sept. 1943. The simile was Alderman Murgatroyd's. See TDB, 20 Dec. 1943.
26. *TCC Reports* (18), Special Committee, 9 Nov. 1942.
27. *TCC Mins.* (24), p. 1690.
28. *TCC Reports* (18), Special Committee, 9 Nov. 1942.
29. "Aikens Mem." (3), p. 109.
30. See *TBD*, 20 Dec. 1943. There was a special meeting of the Special Committee on 10 September 1943 to discuss "the breakdown of meat distribution". See *TCC Reports* (18), Special Committee, 10 Sept. 1943.
31. See, for example, *TCC Mins.* (24), p. 1690.
32. Ibid., p. 1711. Cf. ibid., p. 1729.
33. See *TDB*, 22 April 1943.
34. *TCC Mins.* (24), p. 1743.
35. Ibid., p. 1829.
36. Ibid., p. 2001.
37. Ibid., p. 1988.
38. See *TBD*, 20 Dec. 1943.
39. "Aikens Mem." (3), p. 128.
40. Loc. cit.
41. *TDB*, 20 Dec. 1943.
42. *TCC Mins.* (24), p. 1711. This was on 21 January 1943.
43. Ibid., p. 1754.
44. Ibid., p. 1829.
45. *TCC Reports* (18), Special Committee, 6 Aug. 1943.
46. Ibid., 3 Sept. 1943.
47. *TDB*, 20 Dec. 1943.
48. Loc. cit.
49. *TCC Reports* (18), Special Committee, 29 Nov. 1943.
50. *QPD (1945–1946)*, vol. CLXXXVI, p. 1751 (Aikens speaking).
51. "Aikens Mem." (3), p. 128.
52. *TDB*, 20 Dec. 1943. Aikens' account in his unpublished "Memoirs" agrees exactly with that of the *Bulletin*.
53. *TDB*, 20 Dec. 1943.
54. Loc. cit. See also *QPD (1945–1946)*, vol. CLXXXVI, p. 1511, where Aikens explains his rhetoric about blood flowing in the streets of Townsville.
55. *CRS* A373, 8896, Security Service, Correspondence File, Single Number Series ("Living Accommodation in Townsville"), 1943–1944.
56. Loc. cit.
57. *TDB*, 20 Dec. 1943.

CHAPTER 7

1. T.N.P. Dougherty, General Secretary of the Australian Workers' Union

since 1944. Dougherty was AWU District Secretary for North Queensland between 1938 and 1942. The AWU District Organizer at this time was W.F. Edmonds, later on opponent of Aikens at the 1960 Queensland state election after being defeated as member for Herbert in the 1958 federal election.

2. "Aikens Mem." (3), p. 135.
3. Australian Labor Party (Queensland Central Executive), *Minutes, 1932–1949 (Executive)* [*QCE Mins. (Exec.)*], 10 Nov. 1932, 1 March 1933, 22 Aug. 1933, 12 Oct. 1933.
4. Australian Labor Party (Queensland Central Executive), *Minutes, 1932–1949 (General)* [*QCE Mins. (Gen.)*], 28 Nov. 1935. Twenty nominations from Townsville went forward to the QCE for endorsement. All were confirmed except those of J.T. Bolger and G. Bordujenko, two men with known Communist Party associations.
5. *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 4 March 1936.
6. Loc. cit.
7. See *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 14 Oct. 1936.
8. See *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 15 Oct. 1936. See also *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 10 Sept. 1937, where, under the heading of "Communist Activities", the QCE Secretary reported on the closing of the Townsville branch and "the publication of the letter [directing the closure] in the *North Queensland Guardian*, a communist paper, five days after the letter had been posted from Brisbane". Upon representations from Mr C.G. Jesson, state member for Kennedy, the electorate immediately contiguous to Townsville on the northern side, and incorporating the northern suburbs of Townsville city, the Townsville branch was shortly afterwards "resuscitated" within the Kennedy electorate (see *QCE Mins. [Exec.]*, 12 Jan. 1939).
9. "Aikens Mem." (3), p. 141.
10. *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 11 April 1939. See also *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 11 April 1939: "The Secretary reported the recommendation of the Executive Committee that all the candidates for Townsville, with the exception of T. Aikens, be endorsed. The meeting decided to adopt the recommendation and submit the question of endorsing T. Aikens to a ballot. The ballot resulted in ten (10) votes for endorsement of Mr. Aikens and twenty-one (21) against his endorsement."
11. See *NQLP Mins.*, 30 April 1939. In 1939 Aikens was Vice-President of the Hermit Park branch. Fervently protesting the QCE slight on Aikens, the branch carried a resolution that "if any person or body can or will lay a charge or charges of disloyalty or of contravention of the Rules and Constitution or the spirit of the Labor Party, this Branch is ready to have such charge investigated and, if it can be substantiated, will immediately discipline Aikens".
12. See *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 18 April 1939. However, the QCE said that it was prepared to consider an appeal from Aikens if he made one.
13. *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 21 April 1939.
14. *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 26 April 1939. See also *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 26 April 1939.
15. There was, of course, a *prima facie* inconsistency between the QCE's recent endorsement of Aikens as an official ALP aldermanic candidate and its refusal to endorse his candidature for a state seat. One reasonable explanation would seem to be that, from the vantage point of ALP *apparatchiks* in Brisbane, Aikens, the big fish, could not do too much damage in the little pond of Townsville, but it would be too dangerous to let him loose in the much larger lake of state politics.

16. *TCC Mins.* (23), p. 1443, See also *TDB*, 16 Aug. 1940.
17. See Aikens' remarks on his enlistment in the Legislative Assembly on 18 October 1945 (*QPD 1945–1946*, vol. CLXXXVI, p. 942).
18. *TCC Mins.* (23), p. 1302. See also ibid., pp. 1314, 1322, 1371, 1382; and *TDB*, 16 Dec. 1939, 18 Dec. 1939.
19. See *TDB*, 20 Dec. 1939. When Dougherty addressed a meeting of workers at the new aerodrome at Garbutt, his embarrassment was plain. Asked why smokos had not yet been introduced at the aerodrome, he told the men that he had received "no official intimation from the Council concerning the smokos". Garbutt, a suburb on the northwestern fringes of Townsville, contains the city's airport, a major RAAF base and a large number of light industrial establishments. Its name was officially changed from Garbutt's Siding on 20 July 1939. See *TCC Mins.* [23], p. 1324.
20. *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 18 April 1939.
21. For Aikens' quite unequivocal views on communism, see the long and interesting report of a special meeting of the Townsville City Council on 6 February 1940 (*TDB*, 7 Feb. 1940).
22. Loc. cit.
23. See *QPD 1945–1946*, vol. CLXXXV, p. 847.
24. See *NQLP Mins.*, 22 Nov. 1939.
25. Loc. cit.
26. Loc. cit. Three prominent members of the anti-Aikens faction at this time were aldermen Corcoran, Hamilton and Illich, all of whom later defected from the Hermit Park Labour Party. The motion to request Aikens' resignation was put by Illich.
27. See *NQLP Mins.*, 21 Jan. 1940. Aikens had previously been Vice-President in 1935, 1936 and 1937. He was President in 1938.
28. See *NQLP Mins.*, 25 Feb. 1940. Aikens also gave notice that at the next meeting (March) of the branch he would move the rescission of the November resolution requesting him to tender his resignation as Deputy Mayor. The NQLP minutes for March 1940 contain no record of what actually transpired, but Aikens remained Deputy Mayor.
29. See *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 13 Feb. 1940.
30. See *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 3 April 1940 (in response to a similar request from the Oonoonba branch in support of Aikens).
31. The euphemism was used by the *Bulletin*, reporting a public statement by Aikens after a lapsed meeting of the Council in August (see *TDB*, 16 Aug. 1940).
32. See *TDB*, 16 Aug. 1940.
33. Loc. cit.
34. "Aikens Mem." (3), p. 142.
35. Ibid., pp. 142–143.
36. See "City Council: Temporary Overdraft" (*TDB*, 28 Aug. 1940).
37. See "Lapse of Meeting Owing to Lack of Quorum" (*TDB*, 16 Aug. 1940). See also "Aikens Mem." (3), pp. 143–144.
38. *TDB*, 16 Aug. 1940.
39. *NQLP Mins.*, 4 Aug. 1940.
40. Loc. cit.
41. Loc. cit.
42. Loc. cit.
43. *NQLP Mins.*, 18 Aug. 1940.
44. Loc. cit.
45. Loc. cit.

46. *E relatione* A.D. Murgatroyd. Party Rules distinguished between formal expulsion and "automatic" expulsion. For example, Rule 106 read: "Any member of a Branch of Affiliated Union who is definitely known to assist or in any way further the candidature of any candidate in opposition to an endorsed Labor candidate shall automatically cease to be a member of the ALP, and shall not be readmitted to membership without the approval of the QCE." Rule 105, under which Aikens was charged, attempted to encompass a much broader category of sins involving "violation of Party discipline" (see the corresponding Rules 48 and 49 in Australian Labor Party (State of Queensland), *Constitution and General Rules* [amended 1971]).
47. On 1 October 1940 the QCE asked Aikens to "show cause why he should not be expelled for unsatisfactory behaviour as a Labor representative" (see *QCE Mins.* [*Exec.*], 1 Oct 1940). Since Aikens ignored this request, his expulsion presumably became effective from that date. Certainly this would appear to be the attitude taken by the QCE itself when attempts were later made to reopen the Aikens case: the QCE dealt with them as matters *à propos* "the expulsion of Alderman T. Aikens" (see *QCE Mins.* [*Exec.*], 23 Oct. 1940). On the other hand, Aikens was referred to on one occasion as the "member" about whom no action could be taken because he himself had made no appeal (*QCE Mins.* [*Exec.*], 23 Jan. 1941). However, this was probably imprecise minuting.

CHAPTER 8

1. See, for example, *NQLP Mins.*, 21 April 1940. It was successfully moved "that this Branch write the President and Secretary of the Federal Executive of the ALP congratulating their Executive on the repudiation of a 'Hands off Russia' resolution and also the resolution prohibiting ALP members from speaking at any meetings with known Communists."
2. George Martens to Arthur Murgatroyd, 5 Oct. 1942, "Private Papers of Arthur Murgatroyd," unsorted and unclassified in manila folders, held by the owner ["Murgatroyd P/P"].
3. See *TCC Mins.* (24), p. 1558.
4. See *TCC Mins.* (24), p. 1571.
5. "Aikens Mem." (3), p. 145.
6. See *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 8 Oct. 1941.
7. Loc. cit.
8. Loc. cit.
9. See *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 4 Aug. 1941.
10. Loc. cit.
11. This was sent out on 5 September 1941 (see *QCE Mins.* [*Exec.*], 30 Sept. 1941).
12. *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 30 Sept. 1941.
13. See *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 8 Oct. 1941.
14. In October 1941 a plebiscite of ALP members in Townsville was held to select candidates for the local government election due early in 1942. One of the disappointed candidates, A.J. Eastaughffe, wrote to the QCE drawing attention to the associations of several ALP members with the Townsville "Aid to Russia" Committee. See "Aikens Mem. [3], p. 145.
15. Bryan (QCE Secretary) to Murgatroyd, 10 Nov. 1941 ("Murgatroyd P/P).

16. See *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 17 Nov. 1941; also *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 18 Nov. 1941.
17. Bryan to all ALP Queensland branches, 19 Nov. 1941 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
18. Loc. cit. See also *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 18 Nov. 1941.
19. Murgatroyd to Bryan, 24 Nov. 1941 ("Murgatroyd P/P"). See also *TDB*, 25 Nov. 1941 (reporting the QCE letter and the Hermit Park vote).
20. Murgatroyd to Bryan, 24 Nov. 1941 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
21. Loc. cit.
22. Loc. cit.
23. See *TDB*, 3 March 1943.
24. See Bryan to Murgatroyd, 1 Dec. 1941; also Murgatroyd to Bryan, 21 Dec. 1941 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
25. Bryan to Murgatroyd, 15 Jan. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
26. Loc. cit. See also Bryan to Hamilton, Corcoran, Kogler, Illich and Abercrombie, 15 Jan. 1942; Bryan to Murgatroyd (encl. to Eustace), 23 Jan. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
27. See *QCE Mins (Exec.)*, 12 Jan. 1942; also *TDB*, 27 Jan. 1942.
28. See *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 19 Feb. 1942, 16 March 1942.
29. See Murgatroyd to Bryan, 10 Feb. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
30. Reporting the meeting, the *Bulletin* called attention to the almost unanimous vote (thirty-four to one) of solidarity towards all six renegades (see *TDB*, 27 Fan. 1942).
31. Murgatroyd to Bryan, 10 Feb. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
32. At a meeting on 19 February 1942 the QCE decided that "as Messrs. Illich and Corcoran were not entitled to be members of the Branch they could not be officers, and two loyal members should be elected in their place". See *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 19 Feb. 1942.
33. See *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 26 March 1942. The Brisbane branches were Enoggera Terrace/Ashgrove, Kelvin Grove/Newmarket and Wilston/Grange.
34. Loc. cit.
35. Martens to Murgatroyd, 5 Oct. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
36. Loc. cit.
37. See, for example, *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 8 July 1942.
38. See *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 3 Aug. 1942.
39. The rupture came in the curious form of a personal letter from the QCE Secretary to the Hermit Park Branch Secretary, Arthur Murgatroyd: "It is with deepest regret that I have to inform you that, in view of the decision arrived at by the Branch, conveyed in your letter of August 24, and following out a direction of the QCE, that the Hermit Park Branch is no longer a Branch of the ALP, Queensland Branch. You are therefore requested, at your earliest convenience to forward to this office all books, property and money in your possession." The text of this letter, but not its date, is reproduced in the local newspaper (*TDB*, 23 Sept. 1942). The date remains uncertain because the letter is missing from Murgatroyd's private papers, and there is no QCE minute instructing the letter to be written (so that a taint of Machiavellianism still clings to the affair). NQLP minutes for this particular period have also been lost. However, there was an advertisement in the *Bulletin* on 19 September calling a meeting of the Branch on Sunday, 20 September "to discuss QCE letter re functioning of Branch". Since Murgatroyd no doubt placed the advertisement immediately after receiving the letter, that is, on the previous day (18th), it was probably written and posted on 16 September.

40. This was the branch's claim in February when it made the crucial decision, in defiance of the QCE directive, to continue admitting banned members to meetings (see Murgatroyd to Bryan, 10 Feb. 1942. ["Murgatroyd P/P"].
41. Murgatroyd to Branch Secretaries of Garrick Street Townsville, Oonoonba, Stuart, Ingham, Ayr and Kennedy ALPs, 21 Sept. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
42. Murgatroyd to McNamara, 22 Sept. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
43. See Murgatrod to McNamara, 28 Sept. 1942; also copies of telegrams, Murgatroyd to Martens and Martens to Murgatroyd, 25 Sept. 1942–27 Sept. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
44. Bryan to Murgatroyd, 1 Oct. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P"). The QCE may also have been prompted by a letter from the President of the Townsville (Kennedy) ALP, the disgruntled Alf Eastaughffe, asking if an advertisement in the *Bulletin* "calling for nominations for Herbert over the signature of Murgatroyd" had been authorized by the QCE. See *QCE Mins. (Exec.* (Exec.), 30 Sept. 1942.)
45. See undated telegram, Murgatroyd to Martens ("Murgatroyd P/P").
46. See Murgatroyd to Bryan, 8 Oct. 1942; also Bryan to Murgatroyd, 13 Oct. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
47. See Murgatroyd to Bryan, 19 Oct. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
48. Martens to Murgatroyd, 5 Oct. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
49. See *TDB*, 24 Oct. 1942. The informant was very likely the member for Mundingburra, the Hon. Jack Dash (see fn. 78 below).
50. See Bryan to Murgatroyd, 1 Oct. 1942 (letter confirming despatch of the telegram); and see also Murgatroyd to Calwell, 28 Sept. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
51. See *TDB*, 24 Oct. 1942.
52. Murgatroyd to Bryan, 19 Oct. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
53. See Bryan to Murgatroyd, 1 Oct. 1942, confirming receipt of Murgatroyd's telegram in these words ("Murgatroyd P/P").
54. See Murgatroyd to McNamara, 28 Sept. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
55. *TDB*, 28 Oct. 1942.
56. See *TDB*, 28 Oct. 1942, 24 Nov. 1942.
57. McNamara to Murgatroyd, 6 Oct. 1942; see also McNamara to Murgatroyd, 1 Dec. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
58. See *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 30 Sept. 1942.
59. See Bryan to Murgatroyd, 10 Nov. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
60. Loc. cit. See also *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 4 Nov. 1942; *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 10 Nov. 1942; *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 11 Dec. 1942. And see *TDB*, 18 Nov. 1942.
61. Technically, of course, Corcoran, Kogler, Illich and Abercrombie were not "expelled"; by their own actions they voluntarily "left" the party.
62. See Murgatroyd to Hons. J. Dash, G. Keyatta, C.G. Jesson, 23 Nov. 1942; and Murgatroyd to G.W. Martens, M.H.R., and Senators G. Brown, J.S. Collings, B. Courtice, 24 Nov. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
63. Loc. cit. This rather audacious threat to branch out into neighbouring electorates had been foreshadowed at the time of branch deregistration (see *TDB*, 23 Sept. 1942: "Should other Branches of the ALP refuse to recognize this Branch, the present Branch boundaries [would] be discontinued and the Branch [would] widen its scope and fix fresh boundaries within which the Branch will function.") See also *TDB*, 21 Nov. 1942, referring to "a campaign for constitutional and democratic control of the Labor movement"; and *TDB*, 24 Nov. 1942: "the Hermit Park Branch of the ALP

had decided to cancel the present boundaries of ALP Branches in the Mundingburra electorate, and that the Hermit Park Branch admit to membership all approved applicants resident in the Mundingburra, Townsville, and Kennedy electorates."

64. "Aikens Mem." (3), p. 137.
65. Keyatta to Murgatroyd, 15 Dec. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
66. Dash to Murgatroyd, 15 Dec. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
67. Jesson to Murgatroyd, 15 Dec. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
68. Martens to Murgatroyd, 8 Dec. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
69. Collings to Murgatroyd, 2 Dec. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
70. Brown to Murgatroyd, 3 Dec. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
71. Courtice to Murgatroyd, undated ("Murgatroyd P/P").
72. See *TDB*, 18 Dec. 1942: "Replies to parliamentary representatives re attitude towards Branch." See also *TDB*, 23 Dec. 1942, in which the Branch gave out the comforting, but decidedly exaggerated, information that the politicians were promising "all assistance".
73. See *TDB*, 23 Dec. 1942.
74. "Aikens Mem." (3), p. 144.
75. Ibid., (1), p. 19.
76. Loc. cit.
77. See Martens to Murgatroyd, 21 Dec. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P"), informing Murgatroyd that Martens had written to Bryan about the dispute on 7 December and had since received a reply containing these "surprising" remarks.
78. See Bryan to Keyatta, 16 Dec. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P"). See also Dash to Murgatroyd, 15 Dec. 1942 ("Murgatroyd P/P"), mentioning that the QCE had now decided that "a complete investigation [would] be made at Townsville into the whole of the matters". See also *TDB*, 23 Dec. 1942.
79. See *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 14 Jan. 1943.
80. See *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 19 Jan. 1942. When rumours reached Hermit Park of the moves afoot in the QCE, Murgatroyd wrote to Bryan demanding that the inquiry be held in the interests of "Labor principles and common justice". See Murgatroyd to Bryan, 21 Dec. 1942, ("Murgatroyd P/P"). See also *TDB*, 23 Dec. 1942.
81. See *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 17 Feb. 1943, 19 Feb. 1943, 26 Feb. 1943, 1 March 1943. See also *TDB*, 10 Feb. 1943, containing the Hermit Park demands: "(i) that the Branch again be recognized as a Branch of the ALP, Queensland Branch, with all rights and privileges, by the QCE; (ii) that the Branch be the Head Centre of the Mundingburra electorate, as it has been since 1932; (iii) that all privileges, including continuity of membership, be restored to each member now appearing on the Branch Register as a financial member; (iv) that no member of the Branch be victimized for his loyalty to the Branch in this dispute, either in regard to any future endorsements as a Labor candidate or in any other matter whatsoever; (v) that the Branch Honorary Secretary, Mr. A.D. Murgatroyd, be restored to the position of Returning Officer for the Herbert Federal plebiscite, and that all Branches and persons who were circularized that he had been removed from this position because of disloyalty to the ALP be circularized that such disloyalty has not been substantiated and that he has been restored to the position; (vi) that the letter written to the Honorary Secretary of the Branch advising him that his membership in the ALP was terminated because of his continued disloyalty be withdrawn by the QCE and Mr. Murgatroyd and the Branch advised to that effect."

82. See *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 1 March 1943.
83. See *TDB*, 19 Feb. 1943.
84. See *North Queensland Guardian*, 19 April 1940.
85. See *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 1 March 1943.
86. "Aikens Mem." (3), p. 135.
87. Ibid., (3), p. 146.
88. Ibid., (3), pp. 147–8.
89. See *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 9 Jan. 1946. See also *TDB*, 11 Dec. 1945, 12 Dec. 1945, 28 Dec. 1945, 3 Jan. 1946, 7 Jan. 1946, 9 Jan. 1946, 18 Jan. 1946, 24 Jan. 1946, 26 Jan. 1946, 28 Jan. 1946. See also the *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), 28 Dec. 1945.

CHAPTER 9

1. Commonwealth Archives Office (Brisbane), Accession BP/361, Item 5–2 (GHQ Communiques, 26/7/42) [*CAO* BP/361, 5–2]. Succeeding items from Commonwealth Archives Office accessions and series [*CRS*] are cited in the foregoing form.
2. *CAO* BP 257/1, Box 2 (Australian Broadcasting Commission, Queensland: Transcripts of Talks, Speeches, Broadcasts, etc., 1938–59, 27 July 1942), p. 1.
3. *CRS* A816, 49/301/217 (R.W. Voller to A.W. Welch, 28 July 1942: Report on Air Raid at Townsville).
4. *CAO* BP 257/1, Box 2, p. 1.
5. Loc. cit.
6. Loc. cit.
7. Ibid., p. 2. See also *TDB*, 27 July 1942; and cf. *CRS* A816, 49/301/217.
8. See L.A. Watson, *The Townsville Story*, p. 28, whose account of the first raid tallies with official sources. However, the dates given by this writer for the second and third raids are inaccurate. Cf. also Austin Donnelly, *The Port of Townsville: The Townsville Harbour Board* (Sydney, 1959), esp. Chapter 19, pp. 144–49, who gives the dates accurately but not the size of the attacking force.
9. See *CAO* BP/361, 5–2. The *Bulletin* was inexact when it described the third raid as taking place "late on Tuesday evening" (see *TDB*, 27 July 1942; 29 July 1942; 30 July 1942; and cf. *NQR*, 1 Aug. 1942).
10. *CRS* A816, 49/301/217 (Report to Secretary, Department of the Army, 9 June 1942).
11. Ibid. (Report on Air Raid at Townsville).
12. *CRS* A1608, AJ 27/1/1 (Prime Minister to Premier of Queensland, 15 May 1942).
13. *CRS* A816, 49/301/217 (Report on Air Raid at Townsville).
14. *TDB*, 30 July 1942.
15. Loc. cit.
16. See "Aikens Mem." (3), p. 117.
17. *CAO* BP 256/1, Box 2.
18. *CRS* A816, 49/301/217 (Report on Air Raid at Townsville).
19. Loc. cit.
20. See *CRS* A816, 37/301/199 (A.A. Conlon, Chairman, Prime Minister's Committee on National Morale, to Prime Minister, 1 April 1943; and encl., "Report on Civilian Morale in North Queensland," by Professor R.D. Wright, Professor of Physiology in the University of Melbourne, and Dr.

Ian Hogbin, Lecturer in Anthropology in the University of Sydney, 15 pp. (typewritten, unpaginated) + Appendices [*Report on Civilian Morale*].

21. "Aikens Mem." (3), p. 106.
22. *CRS* A1608, AD 39/1/3 (Acting Secretary, Department of Home Security to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department). The secretary of the Ayr (North Queensland) Chamber of Commerce had sent a telegram to the Department of Home Security asking for an official explanation of government policy on evacuation.
23. Ibid. (Minister for Home Security to Prime Minister, 2 Jan. 1942).
24. See, for example, *CRS* A1608, AD 39/1/3 (Premier of Queensland to Prime Minister, 22 May 1942): "Shall be glad to have your views . . . if Townsville evacuation effected a general evacuation from the north would undoubtedly result."
25. One indication of a movement within the Curtin government towards the formulation of a policy opposed to evacuation was contained in the Prime Minister's reply to a letter from the Deputy Premier of Queensland (F.A. Cooper) on 19 June 1942 in which Cooper drew attention to the vast stocks of non-perishable commodities that merchants and retailers were removing from "all vulnerable coastal areas" between Cairns and Rockhampton. Curtin advised that "no further stocks of supplies should be removed from coastal areas" (see *CRS* A1608, AD 39/1/3, Deputy Premier of Queensland to Prime Minister, 19 June 1942; Prime Minister to Deputy Premier of Queensland, 18 July 1942).
26. *CRS* A1608, AD 39/1/3 (Mayor of Townsville to Prime Minister, 30 July 1942).
27. Loc. cit. Similar telegrams were sent by the Townsville Chamber of Commerce and the North Queensland Employers' Association.
28. See *CRS* A1608, AS 39/1/3 (J. Hackett to A.W. Fadden, 31 July 1942).
29. Ibid. (Premier of Queensland to Prime Minister, 22 May 1942; and see another letter to Secretary, Department of the Army, 11 June 1942).
30. Ibid. (J. Hackett to A.W. Fadden).
31. Loc. cit.
32. *CRS* A1608, AS 39/1/3, Secretary, Department of the Army to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 25 May 1942. See also ibid., Prime Minister to Premier of Queensland, 25 May 1942; and Army Minister to Commander-in-chief, 27 May 1942. Cf. also ibid., Prime Minister to Premier of Queensland, 25 July 1942.
33. *CRS* A1608, AD 39/1/3, Prime Minister to Premiers of all States, 7 Sept. 1942.
34. Loc. cit.
35. See *CRS* A2671, 174/1940, War Cabinet Minute No. 350, 19 June 1942.
36. See ibid., Secretary, Department of Defence Co-ordination to Secretary, Department of the Army, 25 July 1940.
37. Loc. cit.
38. Loc. cit.
39. See ibid. (War Cabinet Minute No. 350, 19 June 1942).
40. Loc. cit. (referring to War Cabinet Communiqué issued in Brisbane on 2 August 1940).
41. See *CRS* A816, 49/301/217 (Report of Air Raid at Townsville).
42. See "Aikens Mem." (3), p. 123.
43. Ibid., (3), p. 107; see also ibid., (3), pp. 124–25.
44. See above, Chapter 5.
45. "Aikens Mem." (3), p. 107.

46. See *CRS* A816, 49/301/217, Acting Secretary, Department of Home Security to Secretary, Department of Defence, 27 July 1942.
47. *CRS* A816, 49/301/217 (from the report of a Chief Clerk, Department of Home Security to Secretary, Department of Home Security, 13 Aug. 1942). This report followed a three-day visit (1–3 August 1942) to Townsville by its author in order to observe the effects of the raids.
48. See *CRS* A461, L356/5/2 Secretary, Department of Labour and National Service to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 22 June 1944.
49. See above, Chapter 5.
50. *CRS* A 816, 31/301/311, Secretary, Townsville Chamber of Commerce to Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, 17 July 1944.
51. See *Report on Civilian Morale.*
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
55. See *CAO* BP 18/2, CRC 30, President, Townsville Trades and Labour Council to Chairman, Emergency Food Supply Committee, Townsville, 15 Oct. 1944. This letter was prompted by continuing bread shortages, a short beer quota, the lack of ham, bacon, "dainties", lollies and chocolates. Earlier and subsequent correspondence referred to shortages of "biscuits, condensed milk, full cream milk, tinned fruit, pepper, macaroni, wax matches, household utensils, fencing wire and netting, starch, clothes pegs and millet brooms", and to the "pernicious practice" of "blackmarketing and back-door selling at exorbitant rates".
56. Loc. cit. See also *TDB*, 6 Dec. 1944 ("Townsville's One Day Strike").
57. *Report on Civilian Morale.*
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Of these, 42 houses and 8 flats were occupied by Air Force personnel (see *CRS* A461, L35/5/2).
61. Ibid. (Acting Premier of Queensland to Prime Minister, 15 Feb. 1944; and Premier of Queensland to Acting Prime Minister, 8 May 1944). See also *CRS* A461, K356/5/2 (Housing, Queensland: Policy).
62. *CRS* A1608, AS 39/1/3, J. Hackett to A.W. Fadden, 31 July 1942.
63. *Report on Civilian Morale.*
64. Ibid.
65. *CRS* A1608, AS 39/1/3, J. Hackett to A.W. Fadden, 31 July 1942.
66. *Report on Civilian Morale.*
67. The site of today's James Cook University's Pimlico campus.
68. "Aikens Mem." (3), p. 114.
69. See below, Chapter 12.
70. *Report on Civilian Morale.*
71. Ibid.
72. See *CRS* A816, 31/301/311 (Military Security, North Queensland). The embargo was partially lifted towards the end of 1944 when, under continuing pressure from civilians in north Queensland, the Australian Commander-in-chief, General Blamey, decided that permission to make "urgent private calls and urgent business calls" should be granted "more freely". This resulted in "a large number of urgent private calls and genuine business calls being permitted from and to the area to which the restrictions apply, subject of course to monitoring" (see ibid., Secretary, Department of the Army to Secretary, Department of Defence, 26 Oct. 1944).
73. *Report on Civilian Morale.*

74. Ibid.
75. Ibid. The two academics visited north Queensland from 6 January to 26 January 1943.
76. Ibid.

CHAPTER 10

1. "Aikens Mem." (3), pp. 121–22.
2. *TDB*, 23 Feb. 1942.
3. See *TDB*, 24 Feb. 1942.
4. *TDB*, 27 Feb. 1942. See also *TCC Mins.* (24), p. 1618.
5. "Aikens Mem." (5), p. 239.
6. See Aikens' report to the Council, given verbatim in *TDB*, 19 March 1942. See also *TCC Mins.* (24), p. 1619.
7. *TDB*, 19 March 1942.
8. Loc. cit. This began on 12 March 1942.
9. See *Report on Civilian Morale.*
10. The committee was originally constituted in May on a motion of Aikens' (see *TCC Mins.* [24], p. 1641). It was successfully moved "that a Special Committee consisting of the Deputy Mayor, Alderman Murgatroyd and Alderman Paterson go into the matter of the protection of the civilian population in Townsville: firstly, the position of the civilians in respect of civil defence; secondly, profiteering by the various business houses; thirdly, traffic control." At an ordinary meeting of the Council on 15 October 1942 the Mayor and Alderman Corcoran were added to the committee, which henceforth would also "deal with all matters arising out of the war situation excepting those which are already the functions of the present statutory committees" (see ibid., pp. 1689, 1690; and see *TCC Reports [1942–1943]*, vol. 18, unpaginated).
11. *TCC Reports (1942–1943)*, ibid.
12. See Appendix v.
13. See above, Chapter 6. Both the Municipal Ice Works and the Fruit and Vegetable Mart were placed under the control of the Special Committee at the beginning of 1944. See *TCC Reports (1942–1943).*
14. *Report on Civilian Morale.*
15. See D. Wecter, "The Aussie and the Yank," *Atlantic Monthly*, 177 (May 1946), pp. 52–56, in N. Harper, *Australia and the United States* (Melbourne, 1971), pp. 154–155. Cf. J.H. Moore, *The American–Australian Alliance* (Melbourne, 1970), p. 55. See also *Report on Civilian Morale*, and *CRS* A1608, AS 39/1/3 (J. Hackett to A.W. Fadden).
16. See D. Wecter, "The Aussie and the Yank."
17. Loc. cit.
18. Loc. cit.
19. *Report on Civilian Morale.*
20. Ibid.
21. See *CAO* BP/361, 1–1, 1–1A (State Publicity Censor: Instruction to Broadcasting Stations, 13 May 1942).
22. Loc. cit. See also *Report on Civilian Morale.*
23. "Aikens Mem." (1), p. 27.
24. *Report on Civilian Morale.*
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.
28. Ibid. See also D. Wecter, "The Aussie and the Yank."
29. *Report on Civilian Morale.*
30. See J.H. Moore, "Australians learn to live with big black bucks," *The Sunday Review* (Melbourne), 13 June 1971, pp. 1022–23.
31. Loc. cit.
32. Loc. cit.
33. *CRS* A816, 37/301/199 (Minister for Home Security to Prime Minister, 14 April 1943).
34. J.H. Moore, "Australians learn to live with big black bucks."
35. Loc. cit.: "Only in Northwest Africa and the British Isles were they as numerous as in the southwest Pacific. . . . The most important concentration . . . was at Mt. Isa where by mid-1942 some 5000 U.S. personnel —3500 of them coloured—manned 1482 vehicles."
36. See U.G. Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops* (Washington, 1966), p. 603: The 91st Engineer General Service Regiment, primarily a labour battalion, had no surveying equipment. "With only a carpenter's level, the field could not be properly laid out; drainage, slopes, grades and alignments could not be accurately plotted. With hand tools, the unit began clearing the area for three landing strips. Only machetes were available for cutting the high grass covering the area. With all men available for hand work, hand tools soon ran out, for there were not enough to go around. The unit rented equipment from nearby farmers, including a horse-drawn mowing machine and a farm tractor. Using an empty beer case, a section of 14" log (felled by the farm tractor) as a wheel, a driftpin for an axle, and slender 6' poles for handles, the 91st devised homemade wheelbarrows. These were augmented by beer boxes rigged with wooden runners and drawn by two men holding a wooden pole on the end of a wire attached to the improvised sled."
37. See *CAO* BP/361, 1–1, 1–1A (State Publicity Censor: Instruction to Press on United States Troops, 16 April 1942, 23 April 1942).
38. Ibid., 23 April 1942.
39. See U.G. Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops*, p. 600.
40. See "Aikens Mem." (3), p. 120.
41. See J.H. Moore, "Australians learn to live with big black bucks." Cf. also "Aikens Mem." (3), p. 120.
42. *Report on Civilian Morale.*
43. U.G. Lee, *The Employment of Negro Troops*, pp. 602–604.
44. Ibid., p. 604.
45. See K.C. Dod, *The Corps of Engineers: The War against Japan* (Washington, 1966), p. 158.
46. See the *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), 3 March 1942; also *TCC Mins.* (24), p. 1619. On 19 March Alderman Paterson moved "that a letter be written to the Townsville Chamber of Commerce, that this Council regrets the publication of the Press item in the "Courier-Mail" [on "red anting"] and shall be pleased to know if such wire was sent to the Premier, and if so, whether it was approved of by the members of the Chamber, or, if it was not sent, the Council would be pleased if your Chamber would take steps to publish a denial in the "Courier-Mail" (*TDB*, 19 March 1942).
47. *TDB*, 19 March 1942.
48. Loc. cit.
49. See, for example, *TDB*, 21 Nov. 1941.
50. Loc. cit.

51. *Report on Civilian Morale.*
52. Ibid.
53. See *TDB*, 21 Dec. 1942 (reporting the "fifth fatality for a week"), 22 Dec. 1942, 7 Jan. 1943, 12 Jan. 1943, 4 March 1943. Cf. also *Report on Civilian Morale.*
54. See *TCC Mins.* (24), p. 1706; *TCC Reports (1942–1943).* See also *TDB,* 22 Dec. 1942, 12 Jan. 1943, Cf. "Aikens Mem." (3), pp. 111–112.
55. See *TDB*, 7 Jan. 1943, 12 Jan. 1943.
56. *Report on Civilian Morale.*
57. Ibid.
58. See *CRS* A816, 31/301/311.

CHAPTER 11

1. "Aikens Mem." (3), p. 108.
2. Ibid., pp. 133–134.
3. Ibid., p. 147.
4. Ibid., p. 149.
5. Ibid., p. 148.
6. See *TDB*, 16 March 1944, 23 March 1944.
7. See *TDB*, 25 March 1944.
8. *TDB*, 18 March 1944.
9. "Aikens Mem." (4), p. 151.
10. See *TDB*, 11 March 1944, 24 March 1944, 23 March 1944.
11. *TDB*, 29 March 1944, reporting the opening rally of the Hermit Park ALP campaign in the Theatre Royal (27 March).
12. The figures were: Aikens, 3658; A. Coburn (Ind.), 2753; L.C. Parsons (Ind. Lab.), 179; H.G. Pass (QPP), 763; L.E.D. Tomlins (ALP), 2930.
13. "Aikens Mem." (3), p. 149.
14. See *TDB*, 15 April 1944.
15. *NQR*, 22 April 1944. See also *TDB*, 15 April 1944, where the leader writer castigated the ALP for concentrating its forces on the "southern front".
16. See *TCC Mins.* (24), p. 1888. However, he remained active on several committees.
17. "Aikens Mem." (4), p. 151.
18. See ibid., p. 152.
19. Ibid., p. 151.
20. See *QPD (1944–1945)*, vol. CLXXXII, p. 668.
21. Ibid., p. 669.
22. Ibid., pp. 77–78.
23. Ibid., p. 1168.
24. See *The Clarion*, 9 Nov. 1944, the now defunct organ of the Protestant Labor Party (and not to be confused with its contemporary namesake, the ALP's northern regional newspaper). On an issue like the Aikens–Walsh fight, the PLP *Clarion* was presumably a reasonably non-partisan, if not wholly objective, source. See also *TDB*, 1 Nov. 1944, 2 Nov. 1944.
25. See *TDB*, 11, 12 Dec. 1945; 3, 9, 18, 24, 26 Jan. 1946. See also the *Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), 28 Dec. 1945.
26. *TDB*, 28 Dec. 1945.
27. Loc. cit.
28. "Aikens Mem." (4), p. 152.
29. *Courier-Mail*, 28 Dec. 1945.

30. *TDB*, 18 Jan. 1946.
31. *TDB*, 7 Jan. 1946.
32. *TDB*, 28 Jan. 1946.
33. *TDB*, 28 March 1946. See also the Communist Party's advertisement advocating the return of the "Communist Party-Hermit Park Team" (*TDB*, 15 March 1946).
34. See *TDB*, 27 March 1946.
35. See *NQR*, 6 April 1946; also *TDB*, 6 April 1946.
36. *TDB*, 8 April 1946.
37. *TDB*, 26 Jan. 1946.
38. Loc. cit.
39. Townsville Trades and Labour Council to Hermit Park ALP, 18 April 1946 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
40. Receipt No. 3, *Cash Receipt Book, Municipal Campaign 1946* (in "Murgatroyd P/P").

CHAPTER 12

1. See Josephine Sullivan, "Localism in North Queensland, 1865–1887." This writer argues that the failure of successive New State movements in North Queensland was attributable as much to local jealousies and animosities as to class or sectional differences.
2. See *TDB*, 26 Jan. 1946.
3. See Cairns and District Trades and Labour Council to Hermit Park Labour Party, 30 June 1947 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
4. See F.H. Bauer, "Significant Factors in the White Settlement of Northern Australia," *Australian Geographical Studies*, 1:1 (April 1963), pp. 42–44.
5. Quoted ibid., p. 41.
6. *TDB*, 14 March 1946.
7. *TCC Mins.* (22), p. 941.
8. This report was summarized in four instalments in the *Bulletin* on 25, 26, 27, and 28 Jan. 1944 "since the matter of the augmentation of the Townsville water supply has been engaging the serious attention of the citizenry".
9. See *TDB*, 26 Nov. 1943.
10. "Aikens Mem." (4), p. 153.
11. See "Mt. Spec Scheme Turned Down by Council" (*TDB*, 27 June 1944). See also *TCC Mins.* (24), P. 1879.
12. See *TCC Mins.* (24), p. 1888. See also "Council Adopts Mt. Spec Water Scheme" (*TDB*, 21 July 1944). Cf. "Aikens Mem." (4), pp. 154–55.
13. See *TDB*, 17 June 1944.
14. "Aikens Mem." (4), p. 155.
15. See *TDB*, 30 Jan. 1945, 7 April 1945.
16. See *TCC Mins.* (25), p. 1977. The poll was eventually held on 7 April 1945 (*for* Mt. Spec: 8343; *against*: 5432).
17. *TDB*, 9 April 1945.
18. *TDB*, 17 Jan. 1947.
19. Loc. cit.
20. *TDB*, 21 Jan. 1947.
21. Loc. cit.
22. See *TDB*, 26 Feb. 1947.

See Hermit Park Labour Party to aldermen J.P. Corcoran and A.M. Illich, 25 Feb. 1947 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
"Aikens Mem." (4), p. 155. See also *TDB*, 25 Feb. 1947, 26 Feb. 1947, 3 March 1947.
See *TDB*, 21 March 1947. For later sporadic expressions of concern over the slow completion of the Mt. Spec pipeline, see *TDB*, 22 Oct. 1948 ("no city in Australia at present was faced with a water supply position so grave as Townsville's"), 23 Oct. 1948, 19 Nov. 1948, 19 Nov. 1949.
TDB, 21 March 1947.
See *TDB*, 23 July 1947.
See *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 12 Jan. 1948, 12 March, 1948; also *QCE Mins. (Gen.)*, 17 March 1948.
See *TDB*, 26 Feb. 1947, 3 March 1947.
On the proposals to establish a municipal bakery, see *TCC Mins.* (25), p. 2000. See also ibid., p. 2027. Cf. *TDB*, 29 May 1945, 20 July 1945.
TDB, 20 July 1945.
Loc. cit.
See *TDB*, 18 March 1947, 21 March 1947, 19 Dec. 1947. By 1949 the ice-works was losing about £1000 per year (see *TDB*, 2 March 1949, 4 March 1949). See also *Ice Works Fund Account, 1944–1948* ("Murgatroyd P/P").
On the proposed Council takeover of the city's transport services, see *TCC Mins.* (25), pp. 2001, 2073, 2210; *TCC Mins.* (26), p. 2339. Cf. *TDB*, 18 Jan. 1947, 16 May 1947, 9 June 1947, 20 Dec. 1947, 23 Jan. 1948, 31 Jan. 1948. See also "Murgatroyd P/P" (separate manila folder).
See *TDB*, 20 Sept. 1947.
See *TDB*, 31 Jan. 1948.
TDB, 20 Feb. 1948.
See *TDB*, 20 Sept. 1947.
Loc. cit.
See *QCE Mins. (Exec.)*, 12 May 1948.
TDB, 5 May 1947.
TDB, 27 May 1947. See also *TDB*, 30 May 1947, 4 June 1947.
QPD (1944–1945), vol. CLXXXII, p. 74.
See Innisfail Trades and Labour Council to Hermit Park Labour Party, 9 July 1947 ("Murgatroyd P/P"). Cf. ibid., similar letters from the Cairns and District Trades and Labour Council, 30 June 1947; the Waterside Workers' Federation of Australia (Cairns Branch), 4 July 1947; the Herbert Electoral Committee of the Australian Communist Party, 26 July 1947. See also *TDB*, 28 May 1947.
See *TDB*, 28 July 1947.
See *TDB*, 19 Feb. 1949; cf. *NQR*, 5 March 1949. The leader of NQLPism in Mackay was M.A. McColl, a prominent citizen and former alderman of that city. However, McColl later had second thoughts and eventually stood as an Independent in the 1949 local government elections.
TDB, 24 Feb. 1949.
TDB, 12 May 1949.
TDB, 11 May 1949.
See, for example, the NQLP attacks on Hamilton, Corcoran and Illich (*TDB*, 12 May 1949). The ALP called the NQLP "a party without a policy", singling out Aikens for particular approbrium: "I-me-my" Tom *was* the NQLP (see *TDB*, 16 May 1949).
See *TDB*, 14 April 1949, 27 April 1949, 11 May 1949.
TDB, 12 May 1949.

53. *TDB*, 14 April 1949, 27 April 1949, 11 May 1949. This was done "entirely on the volition of the Communist Party and without consultation or collaboration with the Hermit Park ALP". For its part, the NQLP took especial pains to "repudiate any support offered to individual members of our team by any other party" and to dissociate itself "from the attempts on behalf of the Communist Party to attach Hermit Park ALP members in the Communist municipal team". See also *NQLP Mins*, 24 April 1949 ("Murgatroyd P/P").
54. *TDB*, 7 May 1949.
55. *E relatione*, H.H. Hopkins, former TCA alderman.
56. See *TDB*, 7 May 1949. Cf. also *NQR*, 4 June 1949.
57. See *TDB*, 17 May 1952, 15 April 1955, 8 April 1958.
58. *TDB*, 2 June 1952.
59. See *TDB*, 2 June 1952, 2 May 1955, 21 April 1958.
60. See *TDB*, 28 Feb. 1958, 3 April 1958, 14 April 1958.
61. In the 1958 election, voting figures were: TCA, 117 327; Aikens' Team, 55 633; ALP, 31 191; Communist Party, 2148; Independents, 1071 (see *TDB*, 22 April 1958).

CHAPTER 13

1. Geoffrey Sawer, *Australian Government Today* (Melbourne, 1970), p. 85.
2. S.M. Lipset, *Political Man*, p. 99.
3. Ibid., p. 277.
4. Loc. cit.
5. Professor Lipset analyses "nonlogical" continuities in politics in his *Political Man*, pp. 270–179.
6. See, for example, *NQR*, 1 March 1947, 12 April 1947, 26 April 1947, 1 April 1950, 15 April 1950, 6 May 1950, 14 Feb 1953 ("Labour's wicked neglect of this province"), 7 March 1953, 21 April 1956, 6 July 1957. See also *TDB*, 23 April 1947, 2 May 1950.
7. *NQR*, 1 March 1947.
8. *TDB*, 29 April 1950.
9. For Aikens' full views on the New State movement in north Queensland, see *TD8*, 29 May 1945 (reporting the official Hermit Park Labour Party policy); *TDB*, 17 July 1948 (reporting City Council opposition to the movement); *NQR*, 16 April 1949; *TDB*, 25 April 1950.
10. See "Aikens Mem. (4), p. 160. John Francis Barnes was member for Bundaberg for three terms (1941–1950). See also Clem Lack, *Three Decades of Queensland Political History*, p. 688.
11. "Aikens Mem." (4), p. 213.
12. *TDB*, 15 Feb. 1957. The ceremony of turning the first sod was performed by the Premier, E.M. Hanlon, whom Aikens respected as "possibly the shrewdest and most down-to-earth politician I have ever known", on 10 April 1947. The *Register* saw the event as marking "the first stage in the geographical emancipation of North Queensland from the South" (*NQR*, 12 April 1947). Hermit Park Labour's support for the project dated from 1945; see *TCC Mins.* (25), p. 1977.
13. *TDB*, 15 Feb. 1957.
14. See the *Courier-Mail*, 31 Jan. 1957, 1 Feb. 1957 (referring to the "Burdaiken" bridge). See also *TDB*, 1 Feb. 1957. De Groot, of course, was the New Guardist who in 1932 galloped on horseback on to the Sydney

Harbour bridge and slashed the ribbon with a sword while the Premier of New South Wales, J.T. Lang, was getting ready to perform the opening ceremony.
15. See "Aikens Mem". (4), pp. 185ff.
16. Anon., from a newspaper cutting, unnamed and undated (but probably from the Ayr *Advocate*) in the "Private Papers of Tom Aikens ["Aikens P/P"], unpaginated, unsorted, unclassified in manila folders, in the possession of the owner.
17. See *NQR*, 8 April 1950, 6 May 1950. The NQLP contested eight northern seats: Mundingburra (Aikens), Charters Towers (V. Hay), Flinders (V. Casey), Haughton (E.P. O'Brien), Mourilyan (W.T. Batchelor), Mulgrave (G.A. Groth), Tablelands (B. Mackay) and Townsville (P.J. Rooney). See also *TDB*, 24 March 1950, 25 March 1950, 3 April 1950, 29 April 1950, 1 May 1950, 2 May 1950.
18. Apart from the 1950 election, the NQLP fielded two candidates in the 1944 election (as Hermit Park Labour), one in 1947 (Aikens), three in 1953 and two in 1956. State-wide voting figures and percentages are given in C.A. Hughes and B.D. Graham, *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics*, pp. 556–559.
19. *QPD (1945–1946)*, vol. CLXXXV, p. 189.
20. *QPD (1944–1945)*, vol. CLXXXII, p. 75.
21. See Margaret Cribb, "State in Emergency," in J. Iremonger et al., *Strikes*, pp. 225–248, esp. p. 244. See also Doug Olive, *The Queensland Railways Strike: February–April 1948*, Coronation Printery, Brisbane [n.d.]. The latter booklet, written by the then Assistant State Secretary of the Australian Communist Party, referred to the "valiant assistance" given by Paterson and Aikens who represented "a new type of workers' politician."
22. *QPD (1944–1945)*, vol. CLXXXII, p. 671.
23. "Aikens Mem". (5), p. 246.
24. See "Tom Aikens, MLA—A Majority of One", Australian Broadcasting Commission, Documentary Transcript No. PNM.37, 17/5/1969, rough copy (unchecked), p. 1.
25. "Aikens Mem". (3), p. 132.
26. Ibid., (5), p. 206.
27. See S.M. Lipset, *Political Man*, pp. 101–103.
28. "Aikens Mem". (5), pp. 215–216.
29. Ibid., (5), pp. 260–262. For the relevant speech in parliament, see Appendix vi.
30. "Aikens Mem". (6), p. 263.
31. Ibid., (5), p. 237.
32. Ibid., (5), p. 238.

CHAPTER 14

1. D.W. Rawson, *Labour in Vain?*, p. 73.
2. *TDB*, 9 May 1949.
3. "Aikens Mem." (5), p. 229.
4. *QPD (1945–1946)*, vol. CLXXXV, p. 210.
5. *QPD (1945–1946)*, vol. CLXXXVI, p. 1669.
6. *TDB*, 6 Sept. 1963.
7. "Aikens Mem." (5), p. 237. Cf. also ibid., pp. 239–260.
8. Ibid., (5), p. 211.

9. Ibid., (5), p. 226.
10. Ibid., (5), p. 230.
11. Ibid., (6), p. 259.
12. See D.W. Hunt, "Forces in North Queensland Politics, 1914–1918," in B.J. Dalton, ed., *Lectures on North Queensland History* (Townsville, 1974), p. 212 (arguing that north Queenslanders, electorally, looked at the man "every bit as intently" as at the party label).
13. See *NQLP Mins.*, 27 March 1958, 27 Feb. 1955, 30 Oct. 1960, 26 Feb. 1961, 26 March 1961.
14. Ibid., 27 May 1956.
15. See ibid., 27 Sept. 1959, 25 Oct. 1959, 29 Nov. 1959 (Secretary's Report), 28 Feb. 1960, 27 March 1960, 24 April 1960, 30 Oct. 1960, 27 Nov. 1960, 28 Oct. 1962, 25 Aug. 1963.
16. For example, a credit balance of £1141/3/3 in 1955 (see *NQLP Mins.* 30 Jan. 1955) had risen to £1981/17/1 in 1963 (*NQLP Mins.*, 27 Jan. 1963). The cost of campaigns in the 1950s varied from a low of £262/10/4 for the 1955 municipal election (*NQLP Mins.*, 1954–1959, loose leaves) to £667/14/2 for the 1956 State election (*NQLP Mins.*, 27 May 1956). See also *NQLP Mins.*, 24 Nov. 1957 (Secretary's Report), and 26 June 1960.
17. Use of the Regent Theatre, Hermit Park, was provided gratis by the owners; collections usually yielded about £15 (see *NQLP Mins.*, 25 Jan. 1959, 31 Jan. 1960). The Melbourne Cup Sweeps were consistently popular and profitable, often bringing in revenue in excess of £450 (see, for example, *NQLP Mins.*, 30 March 1954, 27 Nov. 1955, 25 Nov. 1956, 25 Nov. 1962). In the 1956 Sweep, 299 books were sold for £598; outgoings of £146/9/3 left a net gain of £451/10/9.
18. A record of extraordinary donations to party funds in consideration of an impending state election in 1956 disclosed that ordinary members of the party offered amounts ranging from £1 to £5 for a total of £49, the President giving £10, outsiders £12, and Aikens himself £150. (See *NQLP Mins.*, 29 April 1956).
19. See *NQLP Mins.*, 27 May 1956, 25 Jan. 1959. The average attendance figure at party meetings in 1959 was seven. See *NQLP Mins.*, 29 Nov. 1959, Secretary's Report.
20. See *NQLP Mins.*, 28 Feb. 1954.
21. *NQLP Mins.*, 25 Sept. 1955.
22. *NQLP Mins.*, 29 June 1958.
23. *NQLP Mins.*, 29 Jan. 1956.
24. See *NQLP Mins.*, 29 April 1956. Cf. also ibid., 26 Feb. 1956, when O'Brien made "a lengthy speech on the granting of a donation to the Trades and Labour Council to help striking waterside and electrical workers." Aikens opposed him.
25. See Tom Truman, *Catholic Action and Politics* (Melbourne, 1960), esp. p. 5.
26. *QPD (1945–1946)*, vol. CLXXXVI, p. 1074.
27. "Aikens Mem." (1), p. 36.
28. Loc. cit.
29. *NQLP Mins.*, 31 July 1960.
30. The first of the statutory amendments "benefitting the little man" which Aikens persuaded a government to accept was to a Valuation of Land Bill before parliament in 1944. This made it possible for a man in, say, Mirani to appeal to the valuation court in Townsville without incurring the expense of travelling to Brisbane. See *QPD (1944–1945)*, vol. CLXXXIII, p. 1213.

31. See Aikens' speech advocating the more humane treatment of lepers whom he claimed were being treated as "outcasts" *QPD (1945–1946)*, vol. CLXXXVI, pp. 1101–1104). Cf. also ibid., pp. 588–591; and "Aikens Mem." (4), pp. 172–173.
32. The answer: amend the electoral acts to provide for a personal vote before the returning officer at any time after the issue of the election writ. This was another of Aikens' successful statutory amendments. See his speech on an Electoral Acts Amendment Bill in which he congratulated the government of the day "on taking a forward step in the path towards the goal of true religious freedom in this country", *QPD, (1944–1945)*, vol. CLXXXIII, p. 1358. Cf. also "Aikens Mem." (4), p. 161.
33. "Reporting" was a technique that both Aikens and Fred Paterson appear to have adopted simultaneously (see *TDB*, 10 Dec. 1945, where an advertisement announces Paterson's intention "to report on his work in parliament").
34. See "Aikens Mem." (5), p. 205.

CHAPTER 15

1. See G.C. Bolton, *A Thousand Miles Away*, p. 331.
2. See the article "North Queensland is 'In'," *The Bulletin*, 11 May 1963.
3. See Brian L. Embury, "The Influence of Environment on Electoral Behaviour: A Study undertaken in a Provincial City," unpublished thesis (University of Queensland, 1966), pp. 9–1, 9–5, 3–8.
4. Direct quotations in this chapter, such as the one here, are paraphrased from the writer's notes of interviews with candidates, party workers and voters which were compiled during the course of the actual campaign.
5. In this period the *Bulletin*'s editorial policy was one of haughty indifference towards all local matters save social trivia. It seemed hardly aware that an election campaign was in progress. It made no attempt to report candidates' speeches, and limited its political comment to two or three tendentious leaders: "Every Sign Nicklin Government will have Overwhelming Success at Polls" (*TDB*, 10 April 1963), and "Australian Labor Party Policy Much Too Nebulous to Convince Electorate" (*TDB*, 3 May 1963).
6. The NQLP got wind of the massive build-up of ALP resources. See *NQLP Mins.*, 26 April 1963, where it was decided to take the unprecedented step of inviting all NQLP supporters, not only members, to the next monthly meeting of the party. Cf. *NQLP Mins.*, 31 March 1963.
7. For a study of the campaign in Townsville North, see Jennepher Stephenson, "Townsville North, 1963," in C.A. Hughes, *Images and Issues: The Queensland State Elections of 1963 and 1966* (Canberra, 1969), pp. 319–325.
8. There were 200 party placards (each 90cm × 90cm) featuring a Tucker–Trower combined appeal; and 150 personal posters for each ALP candidate (90cm × 75 cm) bearing individual photographs.
9. In May 1963 Townsville's bulk sugar terminal, containing thousands of tonnes of sugar, was destroyed in a spectacular conflagration. Townsville enjoyed a rare spasm of nation-wide publicity; insurance companies prepared to pay out what was up to that time the largest total claim in Australian insurance history (about six million pounds); the price of sugar on the London market soared to a record one hundred pounds sterling per tonne. Premier and Cabinet Ministers flocked to observe the damage, and

were just as smartly driven away by the stench of burnt molasses and dead fish that hung over the city for a month (see the article "Diabetic Queensland," *Nation*, 18 May 1963). Restoration work was put in hand with the sort of speed and efficiency that were unusual in the north, taking up some unemployment slack.

10. *TDB*, 20 April 1963.
11. See C.A. Hughes, *Images and Issues*, p. 159.
12. *TDB*, 30 March 1963.
13. The book was Lack's *Three Decades of Queensland Political History*, which included a "political portrait" of Aikens (pp. 615–616) along with fifty-one others.
14. *TDB*, 18 May 1963.
15. *TDB*, 20 April 1963.
16. *TDB*, 20 May 1963.
17. *TDB*, 25 May 1963.
18. *TDB*, 22 May 1963.
19. See fn. 9 above.
20. This was the first time in his political career that Aikens made use of the television medium, characteristically recognizing its possibilities and using it more effectively than any of the other candidates. However, he disliked it intensely, deploring the unnatural separation from the hurly-burly of the crowd. He saw 1963 as the end of an era of traditional politicking, realizing that all future "campaigns" would be waged from inside television studios.

CHAPTER 16

1. In a study of the 1972 federal election campaign, a very puzzled psephologist, Malcolm Mackerras, having earlier predicted that the Townsville-based federal seat of Herbert would be the first to fall to Labor, confessed his inability "to discover any satisfactory general explanation" for Herbert's not only not joining in the swing to Labor, but also doubling the previous majority of its Liberal incumbent, R.N. ("Duke") Bonnett. See Henry Mayer, ed., *Labor to Power: Australia's 1972 Election* (Sydney, 1973), p. 240. One might postulate that the explanation consists mainly in Bonnett's grass-roots style of politicking, which he consciously and assiduously modelled on that of Tom Aikens.
2. See S.M. Lipset, *Political Man*, pp. 101–103; and see the reference to Australian conditions in the article, "Classes only Differ on Social Issues," *The Australian*, 25 May 1974.
3. Tom Truman, *Catholic Action and Politics*, p. 6.

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Minute Books (1932–1963)
Vote Books (1932–1963)
Committee Report Books (1932–1963)
Correspondence (1932–1963)
Minute Books contain "minutes of proceedings" of the Ordinary and Special meetings of the Council, each volume usually covering a period of four or five years.
Vote Books contain an alphabetical subject list of all matters discussed by the Council, together with a page reference (or references, if the matter was discussed more than once) to the appropriate minutes. The *Vote Books* also contain a brief précis of the action Council took as recorded in the *Minute Books*. The *Vote Books* represent an extraordinarily meticulous system of indexing and cross-referencing and are therefore an invaluable research tool. The Council used a numerical filing system up to the end of 1950; this was reorganized as a combined subject-numerical system from 1951.

(ii) Townsville Chamber of Commerce:

Annual Reports (1932–1963)
This series, boxed, is in the Local Collection of the Townsville Municipal Library. It runs from 1888–1889 to date but is incomplete.

(iii) Cloncurry Shire Council:

Minutes (1922–1931)

(iv) Queensland Parliamentary Debates (1944–1963)

(v) Commonwealth Archives Office (Canberra):

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(viii) Australian Labor Party (Queensland Central Executive):

Minutes, 1932–1949 (*General* and *Executive*)
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QCE correspondence with branches during the period 1941–1943 was stored in bundles and appeared very incomplete.

(ix) North Queensland Labour Party:

Minutes
Minutes for 1935–1941 are in the possession of the former secretary, A.D. Murgatroyd; those for 1954–1963 are held by Miss N. Paterson, daughter of another secretary. These are the only party records still extant. Several volumes of minutes (1932–1935 and 1941–1946) were lost during the 1946 Townsville flood; others (1946–1953) disappeared with secretary J. Gormley who was expelled from the party in 1954 for misappropriating party funds [See *NQLP Mins.*, 28 Feb. 1954.]

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(i) Memoirs of Thomas Aikens

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(ii) Miscellaneous Papers of Thomas Aikens

Unsorted and unclassified in manila folders, held by Thomas Aikens.

(iii) Miscellaneous Papers of Arthur Murgatroyd

Unsorted and unclassified in manila folders, held by the owner.

NEWSPAPERS, MAGAZINES AND PRESS CLIPPINGS

(i) Newspapers and Magazines

The Townsville Daily Bulletin
The North Queensland Register
*The Townsville Evening Star**
This newspaper ceased publication on 13 April 1940.
North Queensland Guardian (1937–1954)
This communist newspaper was banned between 1940 and 1943, and ceased publication in 1954.
*The Clarion**
This was the northern regional newspaper of the ALP, published by the Northern Labor Newspaper Company of Townsville.
*The Clarion**
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*The Worker**
The Militant and *The Advocate**
The ARU organ originally appeared as *The Militant* from 1 September 1919 to 10 October 1921.
Cummins and Campbell's Monthly Magazine (1926–1957)
Asterisks denote that only occasional issues of the newspaper were consulted, usually for its coverage of specific periods or events. Complete runs of the other newspapers were read over the whole period 1932–1963 or for the periods shown.

(ii) Townsville Municipal Library:

Townsville File
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The above files of newspaper cuttings form part of the Local Collection of the Townsville Municipal Library.

(iii) Townsville Harbour Board:

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The Board holds a comprehensive folio of press clippings on Board matters and related concerns from 1897 to date. This includes reports of Board meetings in the local press (often verbatim), as well as clippings from the *Courier-Mail*, Brisbane, and *The Bulletin*, Sydney.

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